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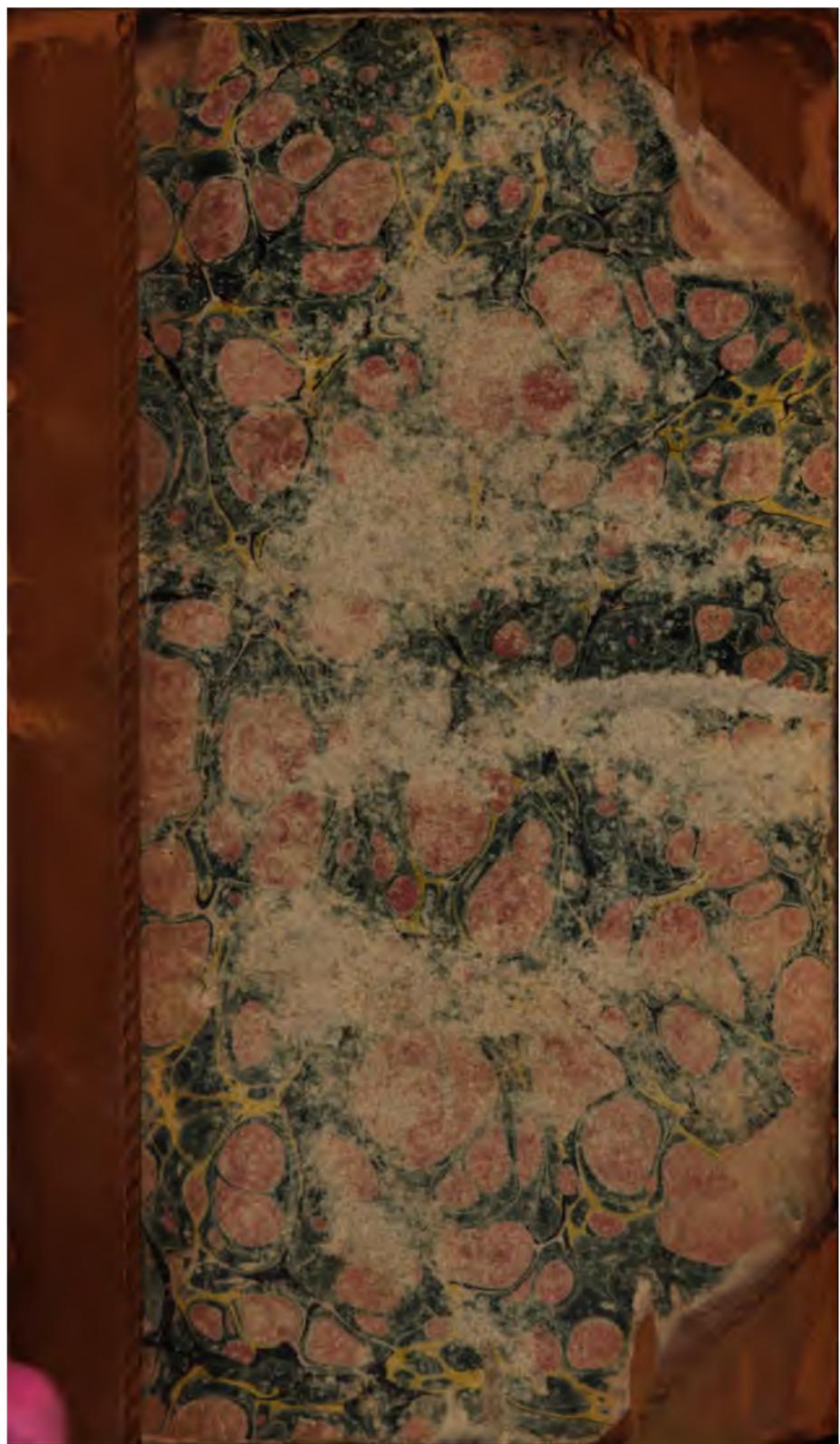
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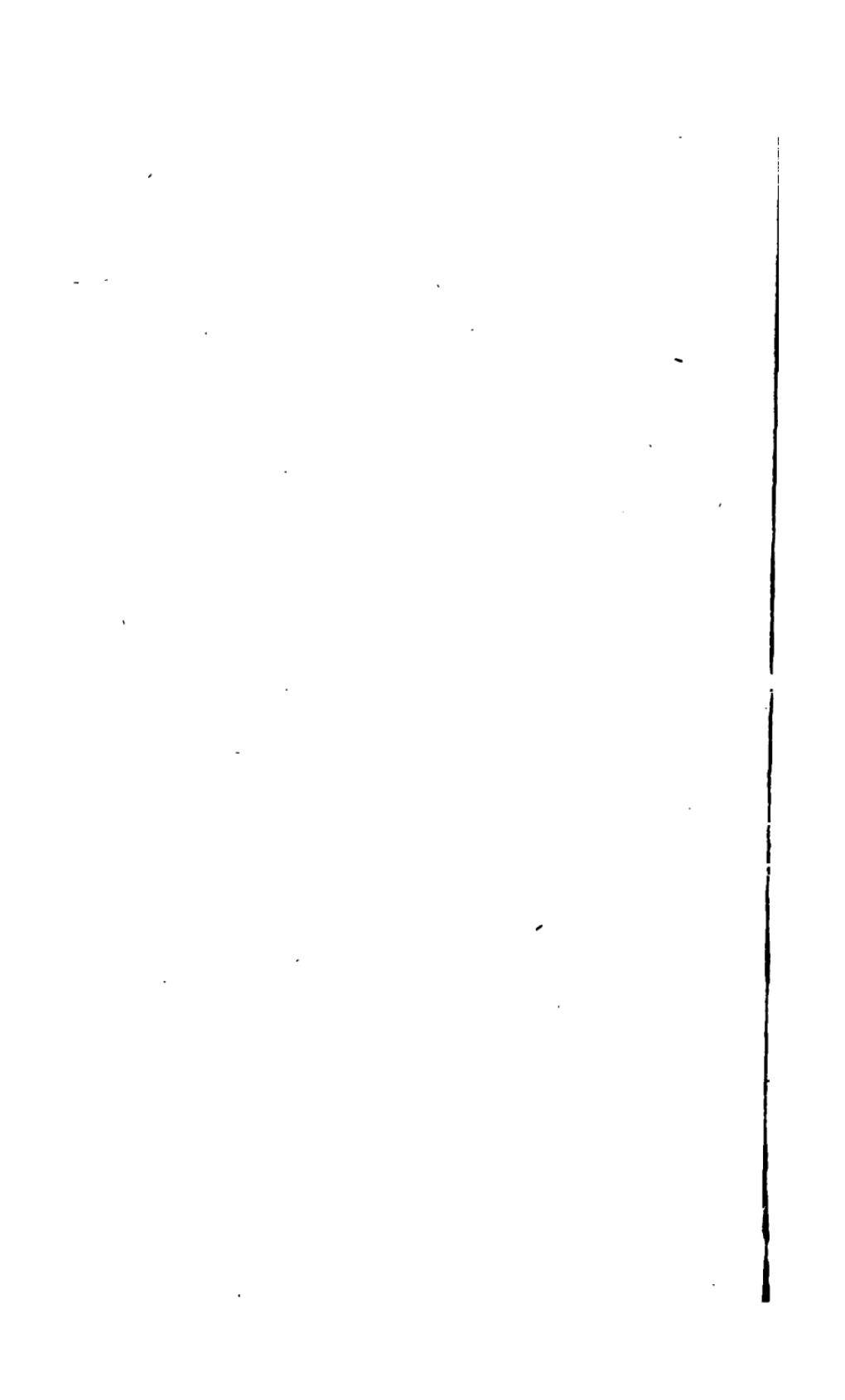


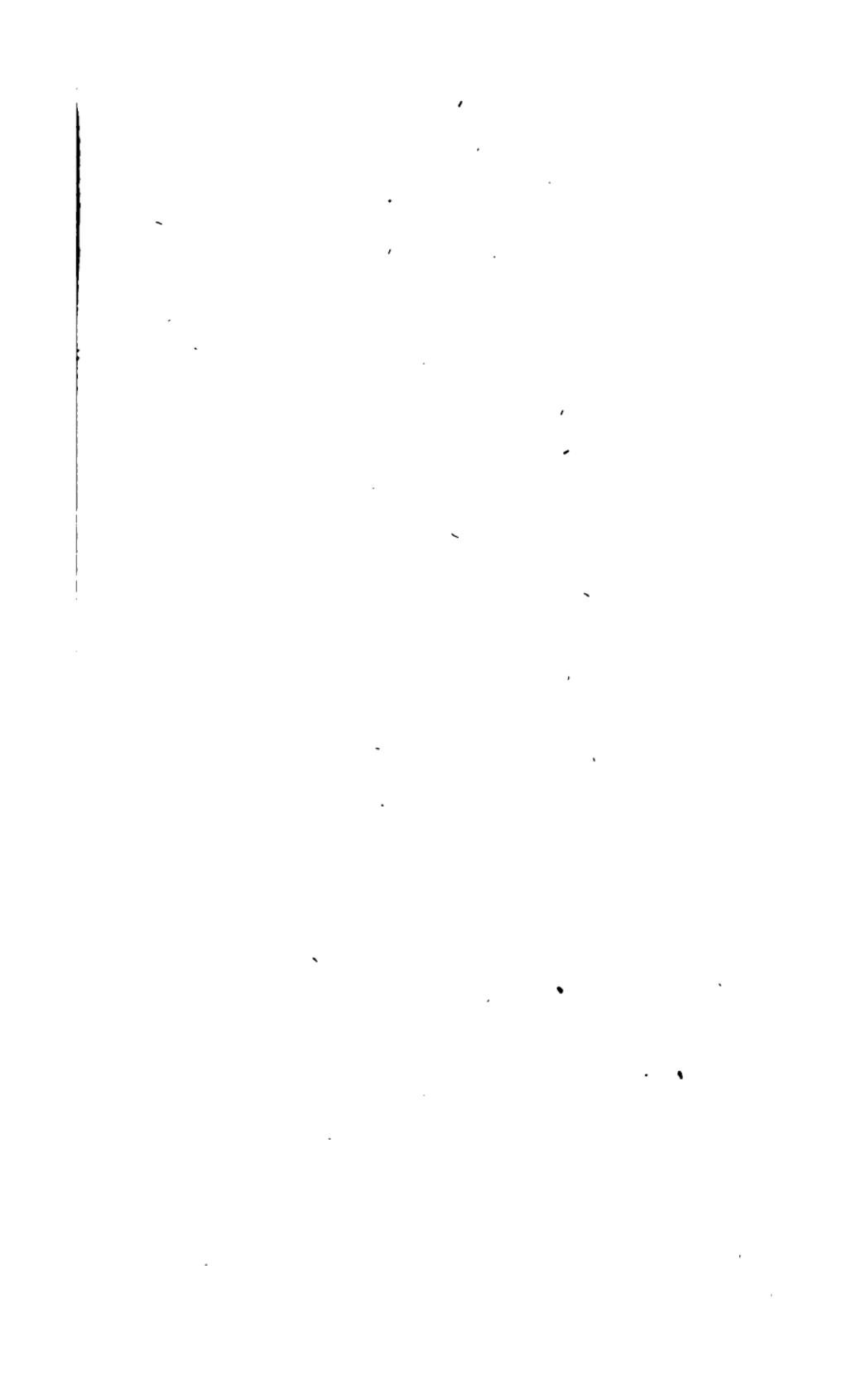


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S T O R I E S
OR
Chivalry and Romance.



✓ S.H. 1027.

STORIES

OF

Chivalry and Romance.

Of bataille and of chevalrie,
Of ladies love and druerie,
Anon I wol you tell.

Chaucer.



London:

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JACQUES DE WILTON.



JACQUES DE WILTON.

A CHIVALRIC SKETCH.

Sound, drums and trumpets, boldly and cheerfully;
God and Saint George, Richmond and victory!

Shakespeare.

FOR seven long years had the young heir of the de Wilton's followed the knightly lance of Sir John de Castlenau, a brave baron of Guienne, whose life was a tissue of romantic and chivalrous expeditions from one land to another, in search of the bubble—Reputation ; relieved here and there, it is true, by the more dangerous and more important ones of national or feudal warfare. But now the term of our hero's apprentisage was about to expire, and it was therefore determined

that he should commence his career of knighthood with a splendour and *eclât*, befitting the high station which the wealth and power of his ancient house entitled him to take among the gentles of the land. Accordingly, a magnificent tournament had twelve months before been proclaimed throughout all England, and the possessions of the English king on the Continent; the laws and customs of chivalry requiring that such a length of time should elapse between the announcement of its sports and their fulfilment.

The vassals of the young baron, from the beardless boy of sixteen, to the grey-locked sire of three-score years and ten, had hastened to the castle of their lord, all equally anxious to witness the ceremony of his admission among the knights and *preux chevaliers* of older standing and established reputation, and to partake of the bounteous cheer provided there for all comers; while half the vagrant minstrels of the kingdom swelled the number of the motley multitude, and contributed their share towards the general noise

and uproar which prevailed, and which was a necessary consequence of mirth and festivity in the “good old times.” But as the influence of a feudal chieftain consisted, in a great measure, upon the number of those who thronged his court, and augmented the train of his followers; the greedy and clamorous visitors of Morville castle, were far from being unwelcome to him whom they had met to honour, but on the contrary, formed a subject of inward pride and exultation; Jacques de Wilton well knowing that the esteem which many of his fellow nobles would entertain for him, would be in exact proportion to the apparent numerical strength which, in the hour of need, he would be able to summon round his standard. But from these nameless attendants upon rank and greatness, let us hasten to hail the more legitimate objects of chivalry and romance.

Yielding to none in the purity and gentleness of his blood, and virtually owning no superior among the proud barons of our third Edward’s

court, the orphan Jacques de Wilton had, notwithstanding, submitted to act the humble part of an esquire to the right gallant Sir John of Castlenau ; not deeming it becoming in him to break the bonds of servitude which his deceased sire had ordained him to wear ; or for his own fair fame and reputation, as a true and loyal knight, to receive that honour without having first passed through those regular gradations which it was expected even royalty itself should acknowledge. A better schoolmaster in the exercise of war and of *courtoisée*, than the brave knight of Guienne, could not have been chosen for our hero. When a mere stripling, he had signalized himself in the celebrated tournament of Condé, given by the Count of Hainault, in honour of his daughter's marriage with the king of England ; and had come off with credit and a fair meed of praise in the gay sports of the Earl of Marsh's Round Table *, two years sub-

* " Erle Mortimer kept the Rounde Table of knigthes in Wales for a pride, in figure of Arture."

sequently: while his knightly achievements at London, Dartford*, and Windsor, shed such a lustre round his name, as even his bolder deeds at Cressy and at Poictiers failed to eclipse. Under the tuition of so accomplished a chevalier, Jacques de Wilton soon learned to be a graceful and expert wielder of the lance and sword; and, while yet a squire of low degree, he was admired by all for the dexterity with which he hurled the dart to its appointed mark, and poised the hurtless spear, in his bloodless encounters with his fellow disciples in the school of real and of mimic warfare. But the time had at length arrived, when he was to bid adieu to his former companions, and to enter the ranks of the second order of chivalric heroes,—to pledge himself by a solemn vow, to support and defend the holy

* “In 1331, Edward held a tournament for fifteen days at Dartford; and on the Monday after St. Matthew, thirteen knights held a hastiludia for three days, against any willing to come.”—“And at Michaelmas, in his fifth year, he held a solemn hastiludia in Cheapside, between the conduit and the cross, such as had not been seen before.”—See *Sharon Turner’s History of England during the middle ages. Chap. 4, Book 2.*

church, and to become the declared and unremitting protector of every injured dame or hapless damoiselle.

The veteran Sir John de Castlenau, full of the importance of the duties which his scholar had to perform, was all bustle and activity, taking upon himself to see every thing properly and becomingly arranged preparatory to the gay sports and exhibitions which were about to take place; thus relieving his faithful squire of all his cares and concerns, save only those cares and concerns which belonged of necessity to himself, as a candidate for admission to a prouder station, and of which, consequently, he could not be relieved by any deputy whatsoever. But, however mindful he might be of those duties in any degree alien to the exercise of chivalry, his own honour, as a knight banneret, forbade his excusing any one of the least of those comprehended in the latter class, or of relinquishing one jot or tittle of that respect and deference which the squire was bound to observe towards his lord, until he

had himself passed through that ordeal which entitled him to be hailed as a brother in arms. But we must hasten to—*la veille des tournois*; and it behoves us especially to devote a few lines to the morn which was to be the forerunner of so important a one as the present, and to usher in the last day of Jacques de Wilton's squirehood.

Never did the courts and courtly environs of Morville castle present so brilliant and imposing an appearance as upon this occasion. Never did the morning sun shine forth upon a more motley crowd of travellers, than those which thronged the “highways and byeways” leading thereto; and the shrill echoes of the merry bugle horn, and the dancing of the variously coloured banners, pennons and penoncelles, as they glided among the green trees, and all advancing in the same direction, gave a gay and lively air to a scene of itself more calculated to convey to the mind an idea of tumult and confusion than of aught beside; while at every opening in the hedge-rows and

forest angles, some plumed knight or baron bold, with his heralds, esquires, and train of liveried followers, might be seen eagerly hastening on their journey, and spurring their jaded palfreys into a nimbler pace ; thereby rather indicating their own impatience, than a necessity for any additional speed, since the proudly blazoned standard of the de Wilton's rose full in view, and they might already hear the babel-murmur of the halls and bowers of Morville castle !

In the middle of a large and spacious plain which fronted the turreted mansion of our gallant noviciate, the area for the proposed chivalric display was marked out, and encompassed by a countless number of booths, designed for shelter or entertainment as occasion might require. The first range surrounding the well fenced ring, was assigned to the preux chevaliers who had come from afar to behold, and to the aspiring squires who were to engage in, the harmless diversions of the day ; and, in the centre of those appropriated to the latter, that of young Jacques occupied a

conspicuous situation, and was easily distinguished from its fellows, by its rich and gorgeous adornments, and from the ancient family ensign waving on its right; while the helmet, the lance, the pennon, and the proud emblazoned shield, surmounted by a laurel wreath, were placed in its front, as the prize for which our hero was about to contend, and which, honourably to win, required no ordinary skill !

“ Tell me now,” said the light hearted Jacques, to his fair and senior sister, as he placed his plumed morion on his head, and was proceeding to quit their tapestried apartment,—“ tell me now, my pretty Helen, do the stars predict conquest or defeat to the arms of thy brother to-day ? Yet mark me, my cunning Cassandra, I’ll have no false prophecies of *evil* from your lips—unless, indeed, you give me also some amulet to thwart their baneful influence !”

“ Tush, tush, Jacques !” replied the arch maiden, “ if my brother *will* place me on the tripod, he must be content to hear what the oracle chooses

to declare, for be assured *I* will not belie the prophet's holy office, even to please the proud son and heir of the de Wiltons!"

"Nor yet, I presume, to inspire with courage the heart of our gallant Saxon knight, Sir Edgar Ethelburgh," rejoined the squire, with a look full fraught with harmless irony, and a smile that gloried in its mischievousness. "But never mind, my pretty Helen, Sir Edgar is a brave and valiant knight; nathless, by the fair fame of our ancestors, he shall feel the prowess of the de Wilton arm in the jousts of to-morrow, else let me fall beneath the puny lance of some lady's page, and forfeit the honours of knighthood! What say you now to that, sweet sister?"

"Why, that 'twould serve de Wilton right, and teach him what he yet lacks, ere he can boast himself possessed of all the essential qualities of a brave and courteous knight. Modesty! my brother, modesty! Knowest thou not, Jacques, what the good king Perceforest once told his companions in arms, when teaching them the rules and prac-

tices of chivalry ? ‘ Though thou art blessed with the possessions of Alexander, with the wisdom of Solomon, and the valour of Hector of Troy, yet sufferest pride to have dominion over thee, they will avail thee nothing ! ’ ”

“ Well prated, by the rood ! ” added the candidate for knighthood ; “ and so, sweet Helen, if thou canst not prophecy, ’tis plain that thou canst preach. But a truce now to these prudential dictates ; I have, as thou knowest, other matters on hand than to listen to the sage moralisings even of a sister, and so fare you well. Yet, stay ! mind thou art in thy seat betimes, or by thine own bright eyes, I’ll challenge thy favourite knight in to-morrow’s tourney, maugre the learned lessons of the good king Perceforest ! ”

As our hero concluded, a shrill flourish of trumpets was heard without, and he bounded off at the summons like a young roe of the mountains, while Helen *des Belles-yeux*, so styled in the Anglo-French of the day, burst into loud laughter at the audacious, yet harmless temerity of her much loved

brother, and anon retired to prepare herself for the approaching sports.

By his fellow esquires, Jacques de Wilton was hailed with no ordinary display of cordiality, and on proceeding towards his tent, in order to array himself for the last time in the arms and habiliments peculiar to his rank, he found his advance not a little impeded by their officious congratulations. But Sir John de Castlenau sternly commanded them to restrain their idle curiosity, nor pester his noble pupil with their ill-timed courtesies. Our hero was now summoned into the august presence of his master in arms, in order that the latter might satisfy himself of his scholar's knowing how to perform those many duties and services necessary to be known by every candidate for the honour of knighthood. From this examination, the young lord of Morville castle had no cause to shrink, for never was squire more thoroughly qualified to mount the ladder of preferment without a fear of falling, than himself, and he donned his several martial habiliments,

with an alacrity which would have surprised the military heroes of the nineteenth century, who strut about in the tinsel trappings of modern soldiership, and glitter in the sunshine of a peace establishment !

The first duty he had to perform, was that of arming his veteran lord ; the next, to array himself in the light and pliable apparel peculiar to his own order, and cased in which he had that day to go through a variety of evolutions, introductory to his initiation into the higher and holier mysteries of the vigil of arms. Having conducted Sir John de Castlenau to his elevated seat among the knights and ladies, judges of the lists, Jacques de Wilton took his station at the foot of the dais, prepared for the performance of those preliminary feats, which were designed to put his skill and dexterity in the useful and imposing exercises of chivalry to the touchstone of experience. The lists consisted of a circuit of some two hundred feet. in diameter, smoothly and deeply sanded, to keep the youthful combatants whom the fatal

sisters might appoint to be overthrown, from receiving any very serious injury thereby ; since the laurels of the victors were not intended to be stained with the blood of their opponents in the warfare of courtesy.

In the presence of assembled thousands, our hero now brought forth his gentle palfrey, and sounding a small bugle horn which hung dangling at his waist, the well schooled animal set off at full gallop round the fenced ring, while his agile master kept close beside him, until having completed the third course, both man and horse stood still, though but for a moment ; the former vaulting into his saddle, without the assistance or of rein or stirrup, continued his circling career for a like number of times, in order to display the superiority of his horsemanship, and convince his applauding spectators, that he could ride as well as he could run ! Many other feats did our brave squire successively achieve, which though mayhap unimportant in appearance, tended each and all to some useful and salutary end, and contributed

their share to the formation of a perfect knight ; but these we shall pass over in silence, referring the curious in such matters, to *St. Palaye's Memoires sur l'ancienne Chivalerie*, where he will find them all duly and faithfully chronicled—on one or two however, even of these, it behoves us to say a few words.

Having gone through the bodily, or gymnastic exercises of the candidates for knighthood, those of art and dexterity followed next in order, and the mock tourney, as the most famous and most essential, had now to be performed. For this display, de Wilton's heir came forth armed in a light and elegant coat of mail ; upon his head a bacinet of polished steel, decorated with a profusion of silver studs (gold being forbidden to the squire), and surmounted by a single ostrich feather ; over his right shoulder was fastened a bright blue scarf, richly ornamented with silver embroidery, while beneath it ran the leathern baldric to which his good sword was attached ; his right hand poising a slender lance, evidently manufactured

for no sanguinary purposes, and the reins of his well trained palfrey held loosely, though gracefully, in his left.

“ Now for thy cunning and thy *courtoisée*, my bold and hardy Jacques !” said Sir John de Castlenau, addressing his military pupil, as he stood armed before him, awaiting but his lordly mandate. “ Hitherto hast thou borne thyself valiantly, as becometh a true and loyal squire, yet if thou failest in the chivalric proof which thou seekest to essay, by the bright eyes of thy sister, we will not dub the knight !”

“ Be it so !” replied the youth, “ and if Jacques de Wilton forfeits the good opinion of his noble master, then let the knightly accolade be withheld. But what saith our gracious sister, will she not vouchsafe us some trophy of her favour, some amulet, to charm our life in the heat of the contests ? or doth she likewise doubt the skill and prowess of the Norman arm ?”

“ No, by our virgin fame, we do not !” replied the maiden of the sparkling eyes. “ And though

we think a bearing more modest would better suit a candidate for knighthood, we will not mistrust thy prowess, brother. There, bold adventurer, guard well thy trophy, under pain of forfeiting our lady favour!"

And therewith the fair Helen let drop one of her golden bracelets, which the esquire caught in his extended hand ; and fastening it beneath the feather of his bacinet, with an air which betokened unlimited confidence in its wonder working power, he bowed to his generous benefactress, and turned to encounter his opponents in the courteous and dangerless affray.

Agreeable to the instructions of the lord of Castlenau, the marshal of the lists had selected a number of the bravest young chevaliers and esquires of renown who had assembled there, to engage in the sports of the tourney, and dividing them equally, assigned one party to the nominal command of our hero, while the other was directed to oppose him in his 'romantic emprise, not less for the purpose of displaying their own adroitness, than for affording him an opportunity of demon-

strating “ in face of open day, and in the eye of light,” that he sought not an honour of which he was unworthy ! .

The preliminaries of the encounter having been arranged, the signal was given—the noisy clarions pealed their onset notes, and the young and ardent combatants at the same instant gave their steeds the rein, and mingled in the heart inspiring tumult of the *mélée*. All eyes were now fixed in eager expectation upon the motions of the gallant Jacques, who on his part strained every nerve in his endeavours to reach the high standard of knightly perfection, which the vivid imaginations of his noble friends had marked out for his attainment. Nor did he disappoint them : for while even his seniors in arms were unhorsed, and rolled pell mell in the dust, he kept his seat firmly and evenly, and in the first course broke his brittle lance upon the breast-plate of his antagonist ; in the second, upon his helmet ; and in the third, met him coronal to coronal—strokes which of themselves rendered any other effort to convince the spectators of his courtesy and prowess altogether

unnecessary ! Checking, therefore, like a good horseman, the impetuosity of his steed, he turned himself round, and advanced slowly before the throne of his delighted master in arms and his fair maiden patroness, to whose countenance he felt no hesitation in publicly ascribing the honour of his success, since it became not one who wore a lady's cognizance in his casque to ascribe his *good* fortune to any other cause !

“Heralds, dissolve the lists!” exclaimed the good knight of Guienne ; and the wearers of the blazoned surcoats obeyed, amid the obstreperous shouts of the surrounding multitude, of whom many pressed eagerly round the person of the departing squire, swelling the number, at least, if not the gentility, of the train which followed him from the barriers of the lists, to the entrance in of his own baronial hall ; beyond the threshhold of which the privileged only were permitted to pass. And here a new scene presented itself. A festive board

“ Of ample room and verge enough ”

to allow of five hundred brave knights and true, seating themselves around it, was extended from one end to the other of the immense gothic apartment; and judging from the truly substantial fare under which it groaned, promised to satisfy the hunger of them all, though each had come there blessed with the appetite of an Apicius!

Sir John de Castlenau seated himself on the dais, at the upper end of the banquet board, and placed his victorious protégé on his right, and the fair eyed Helen, on his left hand—while beauteous dames and damoiselles were ranged beside their knightly champions on either side along the tables' length, intoxicating the brain of many a gallant and aspiring squire, who from behind his master's seat, or the lower end of the hall, was permitted to gaze upon the angel forms before him, and hence to

“Raise his noble thoughts to brave achievements.”

Jacques de Wilton, as in duty bound to do, undertook the important task of carver for his

lord and master, his lovely sister, and for all those who sat near to them; a duty which, as became a dextrous squire, he performed with becoming grace and dispatch. Nor when the more solid viands were removed, did he forget to present to his noble guests the sweet and favourite beverage of British knights, or the deep crimson vine juice of Burgundy; while to his fairer, and more captivating visitors, was proffered the spicy Piment, or the cooling Hypocras.

“Right valiant chevaliers and true!” said the presiding lord of the banquet, addressing his companions in arms, as he held aloft the well freighted goblet. “It is not meet that we set bad examples to a candidate for our holy order, or keep him from confession on the vigil of arms. Pledge me, therefore, Jacques de Wilton, and may he prove true and loyal knight, nor ever forget the lady sister, under whose cognizance he hath bravely broken lance in the sports of to-day!”

So congenial a toast, as will be supposed, was not quaffed “in solemn silence,” but on the contrary, caught at with enthusiasm, and re-echoed with tumultuous acclamations; and the noisy uproar continuing, made it impossible for some time to hear the tinkling of a minstrel’s harp, who having by virtue of his office entered into the hall of feasting, was amusing himself by running his long bony fingers over the chords of an instrument, far from being the most melodious in Christendom, but which, notwithstanding, contributed materially to its master’s assistance, as he caroled the following.

LAY.

MERRILY strike the sounding string,
To valour’s martial story!
Merrily, Troubadours, merrily sing,
Your lays of love and glory!—
With proud and princely bearing
A youthful warrior came,
Encased in steel,
From head to heel,

And girt for deeds of daring,
And glory and acclaim !

He came by knights surrounded,
And squires and ladies fair,
And trumpet blast,
As on he passed,
O'er hill and dale resounded,
His coming to declare !

And now the train's in motion
Along the cloistered floor,
And robed in white
The Neophyte,
Bows down in deep devotion,
Saint Agnes shrine before !

And while devoutly kneeling,
Upon that hallowed ground,
He heard arise,
Sweet symphonies,
Like choir angelic pealing,
Above him and around !

Entranced—amazed—amazing !
As touched by wizard wand,
"Till every sense
Its influence
Confess'd—when upward gazing,
He saw that spirit band.

In robes of snowy whiteness,
Saint Agnes there appeared,
 Around her brow,
 The sunshine glow
Of heaven, without that brightness,
 By mortal vision feared.

The warrior bowed before her,
 And breathed a silent vow,
 With lance and sword,
 Her shrine to guard,
To worship and adore her,
 Alike in weal or woe.

His noble soul rejoices,
 Freed from all sense of pain
 Or fear of ill :—
 Yet whence that thrill ?—
Mute were those angel voices,
 And hushed that seraph strain :—

And earthly tints had blended
 With heaven's unclouded light :—
 The vision gay
 Had passed away :—
Day dawned—his watch was ended,—
 The warrior rose a knight !

Merrily strike the sounding string,
 To valour's martial story,—
Merrily, Troubadours, merrily sing,
 Your lays of love and glory !

No sooner had the minstrel concluded his lay, than Jacques de Wilton, reminded thereby of the important duties which he had to perform, hasted to prepare himself for confession, in order that he might enter upon his new dignity shrived of all his past sins and transgressions, and pure and spotless in the eye of the church. Withdrawing therefore from the festive board, he hurried away to meet his holy Father confessor, who had been anxiously waiting his appearance in the adjoining chapel for a good hour at least,—how patiently we pretend not to say. The first solemn ceremonies of religion having been gone through, our novitiate proceeded to the bath which had been prepared for him, where he performed those bodily ablutions which the strict ordinances of chivalry prescribed for his purification. The snow-white robe of the Neophyte was now thrown over him, and following the footsteps of his ghostly conductor, he proceeded “stately and slow and properly attended,” to the neighbouring monastery,

there to pass in prayer and praise and holiest meditation the vigil of arms.

Arrived at the sacred threshold of the sanctuary, his casque and the more cumbrous portions of his armour were removed, and he advanced along the drearily illuminated aisle to the foot of the high altar, round which were ranged the priests of religion clad in their consecrated robes, and aiding with their rich and mellow voices the harmonious strains of the deep toned organ. The sword which, since his entrance within the hallowed fane, our hero had carried in his hand, was now carefully deposited upon the steps of the altar; and while the holy fathers chaunted their Latin formularies, or went through the imposing ceremonies of the high mass, he, kneeling before them, was himself engaged in reciting the prayers marked out for him in the missal, or in muttering his *Ave Marias!* The performance however of these, in themselves, sublime services, produced a most impressive effect, and which, heightened as it was by the solemn notes of sacred harmony, echoing

at times along the empty cloisters, could not fail to inspire the most thoughtless with a feeling of devotion, and to bring the mind of the most careless worshipper into such a subjection to its power, as would enable him successfully to combat both his natural and habitual inclinations to repose, for the vigil of arms to the faithful Neophyte was to be a night of ceaseless and perpetual watching, and Jacques de Wilton, complying with the law even to the very letter, closed not his eyes in sleep, nor suffered his thoughts to wander from worship, or his lips to rest from adoration. Once, indeed, when his holy and devout companions retired for a short time, between the intervals of midnight and of morning service, did he venture to look around. Alone in that gloomy, though consecrated place, a mingled feeling of dread and awful reverence stole over him, and his blood ran chilly through his veins, when under the spell-like influence of the moment he fancied he perceived, through the dusky twilight which barely served to

make darkness visible along the dreary and deserted aisles, the cross-legged effigies of his illustrious ancestors rise from their marble resting places, to hail their descendant, and to be witnesses to the sincerity of his devotions. But while yet intent upon the imagined miracle, the soft warbling under-tones of the organ recalled his scattered senses, and he resumed anew the suppliant attitude of prayer. In a few minutes the reverend brotherhood re-entered, and sweeping by him in their long milk-white vests, ascended the steps of the altar, swinging to and fro their golden censers, and filling the place with the powerful perfume of ambergris, frankincense and myrrh !

At length, the purple dawn of day put an end to the masses and mummeries of religion, and the matin bell released our young hero from his long protracted genuflexions before the shrine of St. Agnes, and opened the sanctuary doors for the admission of his waiting friends, who now came, one and all, to offer him their congratulations upon the appearance of the day which was to see

him numbered among the brave knights and true
of the island of Britain !

The entrance of these was the signal for our devout novitiate to bestir himself.—Taking up his sword from the altar-steps, he presented it to the reverend priest, who, placing it for a few minutes upon the altar, pronounced over it a short benediction, then hung it by a scarf of embroidered silk round the neck of its noble owner, by whom, however, it was immediately removed, and presented again to his master in *l'école des armes*, who at the same time he humbly besought to confer upon him the high and envied honour of knighthood. The brave baron-knight of Guienne, received the consecrated weapon, demanding, as he did so, of the kneeling suppliant, his motives for seeking to enrol himself among the number of knights and chevaliers.

“ Canst thou,” he inquired, “ prove true and loyal knight,—bind thyself to the support of the holy church,—the defence of thy lawful king, and to maintain the rights and privileges of

chivalry, and the honour of all fair and virtuous dames?"

"These things will I do!" replied our novice, "and by the help of the Lord and our great patron St. George, will maintain them to the utterance."

His unsheathed sword was now proffered him, and he fervently kissed its naked blade, as he did likewise the ivory crucifix presented him by the holy abbot; which done, Sir John de Castlenau consented to grant his request, and motioned the attendant knights to arm their future brother, a duty which they performed with becoming alacrity, beginning with buckling the golden spur upon the left heel, next came the polished breast-plate,—the "hauberk's twisted mail,"—the glistening greaves,—the challenging gauntlets,—and so successively with each several piece of the knightly dress, concluding with the swordless scabbard, which was finally girt beside him. And thus de Wilton's heir stood before his chivalrous judges and companions, equipped in the whole of his

defensive armour save the helm, which with its towering plume was at hand, in readiness to be placed upon his head, immediately his master-knight should have bestowed upon him the well-earned accolade.

This last portion of the inauguration ceremony was all that now remained to be performed:—the *Esquire* Jacques de Wilton knelt down for the last time, and as he bowed his bare head, and crossed his mailed hands upon his breast, de Castlenau rising in his seat, lifted the rank-conferring glaive on high, and with these words, laid it thrice across the shoulders of our novitiate:—“In the name of God, the blessed virgin our lady Saint Mary, and the great Saint George, I dub thee knight;—be bold, be brave, be loyal.—Rise up Sir Jacques de Wilton!” Immediately the new made knight sprung upon his feet, and, while the helmet was being adjusted upon his head, seized the shield and lance from the hands of those who held them,—bowed to his late master, to the priests, and to the shouting spectators, and,

accompanied by his new brethren in arms and in renown, advanced slowly and statelily towards the porch of the sanctuary, where for the last twelve hours he had been a prisoner.

A proud courser stood ready caparisoned at the minster gate, and the knight bachelor of Morville castle vaulted into the saddle, armed though he was at all points, without the assistance of the dangling stirrup. Comely and graceful was his bearing, as he rode along waving his lance and brandishing his sword, that the people might behold him who had been just elected to be their defender. A vast multitude of all ranks and gradations of life, followed or pressed around him ; but from their stunning and troublesome greetings, he was glad to retire to the comparative quiet of his own baronial halls.

Here, among the first to welcome his return, came forth his fair-eyed sister ; in one hand holding a small tome, beautifully ornamented on the back with a variety of tasteful and appropriate devices in gold and silver-work ; and in

the other a crimson pennon, upon which the name of “Helen de Wilton,” was emblazoned, thereby indicating the fair giver; and at the same time hinting, that it was expected his first lance should be broken in her honour.

“Welcome, my noble brother!” said the presiding genius of our hero’s fortune, “we congratulate you most joyously upon your newly acquired honours, and doubt not, but Sir Jacques de Wilton will prove as brave and valiant a knight as he did a true and loyal squire.”

“Thanks for thy greeting, sweet sister,” rejoined Sir Jacques, and kissed her smiling lips, “but what hast thou here?—Nay, nay,—it was meant for some gallant hero, I warrant me; but I *will* see it, though it were destined for Sir Edgar Ethelburg himself!” And so saying, he took by gentle force the tome above described.

“And is it thus Sir Jacques de Wilton commences his career of chivalry?—Methinks, Sir knight, your present emprise at least hath been rather lacking in the much vaunted courtesy of

your order.—Mind, therefore, now that thou hast thy register; that thou record faithfully therein this thy first adventure, or by our virgin fame, we will proclaim thee in tilt and tourney as an unfaithful knight!”

“ Ha, ha, ha!—I thank thee for thy favour, sweet sister,” added our chevalier, laughing, as he turned over the blank leaves of his pocket book, “ and we will keep it, as truly as we hope to do our knighthood; and enregister our adventures therein faithfully enough, to save us from thy threatened vengeance.”

“ We believe thy word, sir knight,” continued the lady of the sparkling eyes, “ and in token thereof, appoint thee defender of our fair fame in the combats of to-day; be bold, therefore, and dextrous.—Moreover, as a badge of thy lady-service, we give thee this pennon, the work of our own hands, and see thou defend it well, under pain of our high displeasure.”

Sir Jacques de Wilton accepted joyfully the proffered trophy, and kneeling down, as became a

courteous chevalier, kissed the white hand of the giver; then appending the conspicuous cognizance to the summit of his rich and gorgeous casque, he bowed gracefully to his beauteous patroness and led her into the hall, where was provided a most plenteous and substantial breakfast. Here a fresh crowd of knights, and squires, and ladies gay, stood in readiness to offer him their congratulations; and foremost among these, came Sir Edgar Ethelburg, the chosen and acknowledged champion of "Helen des Belles-yeaux;" and clasping the gauntleted hand of his old acquaintance, welcomed him as a brother in arms.

The morning meal was soon dispatched, and the clatter of arms and the babbling of noisy tongues, again burst forth as the satiated gentles hied them hence to their several posts, preparatory to their becoming either active performers or passive spectators in the approaching sports, to which also it now behoveth us to conduct the patient reader.

Every thing connected with the due order and arrangement of the lists, had been properly attended to by the pursuivants at arms ; who, as they made their appearance, conducted the knights-combatants to their appointed tents, and the ladies to their elevated seats above them. The pavilion of Sir Jacques was easily distinguishable by its bright and splendid adornments, while near it the proud banners of his ancestors danced gaily in the morning breeze, and glittered in the sunshine. On the opposite side of the lists, rose the gallery prepared for the reception of Helen de Wilton and her more intimate friends, where also an equally conspicuous seat was provided for the late master in arms of our newly created knight.

All was now in readiness, and the lords and ladies gay had each taken possession of their respective places, when the shrill braying of the heralds' trumpet summoned within the barriers all those who meant to contend for the prize of the ruby and the ring ;—immediately, six young and graceful chevaliers made their appearance,

one of them being Sir Jacques de Wilton, who was beautifully clad in a surcoat of dazzling chain armour, and a crimson mantle, tastefully embroidered with gold and fastened in the front by a buckle of the same metal, hung over his shoulders and flowed down so as to come into contact with the caparisons of the steed, which were likewise of cloth of crimson and gold, and which served as a covering to the whole body of the prancing animal; equally gorgeous and costly were the dresses of the other riders, each of whom, as he came forth into the arena, looked around him, first at the witnessing throng, and then at the object upon which he was to exercise his knightly cunning and dexterity;—this was no other than a small gold ring, suspended by a thread of fine silk to the cross bar of a tall pole planted at the principal barrier.

The marshal of the lists having ranged the several candidates according to their chivalrous standing,—Jacques de Wilton, as the junior knight, being placed last,—the barrier was opened and

signal given that the first of the troop should run. Silently invoking the name of his mistress-love, he directed his keen eye to the mark and gave his steed the rein, but the point of his weapon left the ring untouched; as did likewise that of the knight that followed him; the third cavalier ran his course with more honour at least, if not with more success, since his well aimed lance approached so near the coveted object, as to cause it to spin round with a velocity which left the spectators for some time in doubt, as to whether or not it was still left hanging to the cross-bar. In a few moments, however, it again became distinguishable, and the three remaining knights successively essayed the romantic achievement, and levelled their slender spears at the pendant circlet, as their nimble coursers bore them at full gallop beneath; but fortune favoured not their essays, and the golden prize was seen swinging to and fro by its silken cord, inviting to renewed exertions the rival lances of the courteous candidates.

The laws and practices of chivalry allowed the knights three courses ; but in the second Sir Jacques de Wilton bore away the object of competition, to the no small satisfaction of himself, his master in the school of knighthood, and the bright eyed maidens, who watched from the tapestried galleries above, the issue of the enterprise. On his proceeding to present himself, before the throne whereon the fair owner of the prize was seated, many a lady's favour fell around him, and assured him that he should not lack subjects for displaying his prowess and his gallantry. Extending the point of his lance to which the ring was still affixed, towards his "sweet sister," she released him with becoming grace from his envied charge ; after which he forthwith retired into his tent, to prepare himself for the jousts which he had yet to maintain in the lists of courteous emulation.

Upon his re-appearance at the heralds' summons, the lady Helen restored to him the ring which he had so cleverly won, and hanging it

by a blue ribbon round his neck, constituted him for that day her true and loyal chevalier, who was bound to maintain the peerlessness of her charms to the utterance, against whoever should venture to gainsay them.

The preliminary arrangements having been gone through, the bearers of the brazen trumpets proclaimed aloud the defiance of our hero, who at the same time flung down his gauntlet, for which pages and squires without number, instantly started, as for some beauty's trophy.—The nimble footed Henri was the first to obtain it, and well pleased with his success, he bore it in triumph to the pavilion of his noble master Sir Everhard Norton, a knight whose name lives only in the chronicles of chivalry and romance, history never having enrolled it in her more enduring records. But charmed as the life of the challenger was by the favours of Helen des Belles-yeaux, bold indeed and skilful must that knight have been, and superhuman the graces of his lady-love, who could hope to overcome in the listed plain, the brave pupil of Sir

John de Castlenau. In brief, Sir Everhard Norton was worsted in the second course ; nor did a better fortune attend the five other knights who, following his example, accepted successively our hero's cartel, and strove to defend the superiority of their ladies' charms, in opposition to those of the fair-eyed Helen. But after these, no other champion choosing to come forth in answer to the heralds' call, the gay sister of Sir Jacques de Wilton was formally declared to be peerless and unrivalled in the lists of Morville castle ; while the successful assertor of her maiden beauties, felt himself amply rewarded for the perilous hazard which his knightly reputation had been subjected to, by the applause of his brethren in arms, and the smiles and favours of the lovely spectators who witnessed from on high his chivalrous achievements.

The victor having paid his devoirs to his judges, and received the thanks of the queen of beauty, immediately retired to his tent, least by an unnecessary parade of his person, he should incur the free censure

of his senior compeers, for being too vain and ostentatious of his newly gained renown ; every knight deeming it to be a part of his duty to instil into the mind of those just initiated into the mysteries of their order, the virtue of modesty ; not that they were themselves over careful about observing it upon all occasions. . .

The barriers were now opened for the admission of the plebeian throngs, who had hitherto from without sought, many of them in vain, to catch a glimpse of what was going forward within the lists, but who were now permitted to gaze upon the gorgeous and brain-bewildering scene around them ; while the cavalresque actors were preparing themselves for the grand tournament, which Jacques de Wilton with twenty-three other young knights had declared themselves ready to maintain, against an equal number of *preux* and courteous chevaliers, let them be who they might.

The multitude had not however enjoyed their high privilege long, when the martial swell of a distant bugle, caused every eye to be turned to-

wards the quarter whence so unexpected a sound seemed to proceed. The marshal of the lists commanded his officers instantly to clear the arena, and to put every thing in order for the upshot of the adventare; the gay-coated heralds hied them to their respective posts, and the barriers were again hastily closed. Scarcely had these movements been accomplished, ere a costlily arrayed knight appeared before them, and by the mouth of the squire who accompanied him, demanded admission. His countenance was concealed from view by the closed vizor; but the richness of his arms, offensive and defensive, and more especially the extreme gracefulness of his carriage, were of themselves sufficient to satisfy all present that he was of gentle blood, and worthy to break a lance with the bravest and proudest of the assembled chivalry. He was mounted on a steed of milky whiteness, as far as could be judged from the little which met the eye, the whole body of the noble animal being enveloped in the amplexness of its gold em-

broidered horse-cloths and caparisons. The stranger-champion himself wore a cuirass of well polished steel, with cuisses and bassarts of alternate plates of steel and brass; his haughty helmet was of the same metal as his breast-plate, and was surmounted by a plume of light blue ostrich feathers, to the base of which was affixed, what he deemed his proudest ornament,—the silken scarf of his mistress, which had rewarded his bold exploits in some former field. His shield (that page of knightly blazonry, to which the learned herald generally turned for his information), was covered with a housing of plain varnished leather, which concealed his armorial cognizance, as carefully as the closed vizor did his countenance from the inquisitive glance of curiosity.

As he approached the purlieus of the chivalrous exhibitions, he reined-in his spirited courser, and advanced slowly and stately to the barrier, over which he flung his mailed glove, while at the same instant his well-tutored attendant exclaimed aloud,—

“Heralds and pursuivants at arms!—The knight of the badgeless shield hereby pledgeth himself to prove with lance or sword, his lady-love to be unrivalled for beauty and virtue in any court in Christendom,—and let him who denies it ~~come~~ FORTH, be he true and courteous knight!”

“A bold defiance, by our great St. George.” said Sir John de Castlenau, “yet one which cannot now be received, save only with the permission of the gentle damsel whom we have already declared to be fairest in the lists of Morville castle.—Or wilt thou, sir knight of the badgeless shield, except in thy challenge, our noble queen?”

“Nay, nay; Sir John of Castlenau,” replied the fair maiden referred to, “we will have no exceptions in *our* favour, since we doubt not but the valour and prowess of our gallant chevaliers, will be able to prove there are other damsels in Christendom as beauteous, aye, and as virtuous too, as the nameless lady-love of yonder nameless knight.” Then turning herself towards the gay

pavilions of those in whose gallantry she so freely confided, she added, with a playful smile, “ Sons of the brave,—COME FORTH !”

The attentive heralds caught up the cheering exclamation, and repeated it again and again; and the lords of the lance and sword issued from their tents, well pleased to answer a summons which promised to give them another chance of displaying their courage and their *courtoisie*; Sir Jacques de Wilton, unfortunately as he then thought, came too late to accept the cartel with that forwardness which he conceived himself bound to manifest, in justice to his own reputation, as the victor in the preceding jousts; four other champions having been beforehand with him, in presenting themselves to the marshal of the lists as ready to maintain at the point of the lance, their ladies to equal in beauty the unknown dame of the stranger knight. These adventurous heroes had, however, soon reason to rue their temerity: Fortune declared against them; and consequently they failed in establish-

ing the superiority of their ladies' charms, and were each in succession unhorsed and unharnessed by their gallant antagonist.

The master-proof had now to be achieved ; and as the stake which Sir Jacques de Wilton hazarded was much greater than that of the other combatants, so the interest excited was proportionably increased. Banishing from his mind the recollection of the ill-luck which had attended the essays of the vanquished knights, he prepared himself manfully for the rencontre, and placing his lance in rest, awaited the marshal's signal for pricking his steed to the onset : but for this he waited not long.

The courteous conflict which forthwith ensued, proved to be one of rare and unequalled dexterity, each of the jousters breaking his lance for five successive courses, between the four quarters ; and it promised fair to become a knotty and dubious question of appeal for the wise and learned in the niceties of chivalric legislation, to exercise their wits upon, when the sixth course decided it in

favour of—Jacques de Wilton, the reader will be ready to exclaim ; but not so, for our hitherto victorious champion was fairly borne from his courser's back by dint of superior muscular strength. Each of the combatants had so well aimed his stroke, that either lance struck its opponent shield at the same instant. The unbending weapon of the unknown knight pierced through the buckler of his noble antagonist, whom he forced over the crupper of his saddle to the earth. That of Sir Jacques de Wilton striking the shield of his rival in renown in nearly the same point, tore open the housing which had hitherto shrouded it from view, and he recognised in falling the family arms and device of the bold Saxon knight Sir Edgar Ethelburg, above which was emblazoned in letters of gold, HELEN DES BELLES-YEUX.

The romantic jest was now at an end ; and though the lord of Morville castle had fallen, the superiority of his sweet lady-sister's charms, was established by another, and a more valiant, or else more practised arm ; and as our vanquished

champion was unhurt, he had only to submit patiently to the vagaries of his wayward fortune, and to learn from his late disaster to bear himself less vauntingly in future towards his brethren in arms, and with that modesty which should always characterize a true and perfect knight; since instead of being the challenger, as he had once threatened to be, he was himself the challenged of Sir Edgar Ethelburg ! The victor immediately dismounted from his steed, and presenting himself before the fair queen of the lists, prayed forgiveness for having overthrown her acknowledged champion: a prayer which, as may be supposed, was readily granted ; accompanied with a remark, that her noble brother would learn from the adventure, a lesson which she had in vain essayed to teach him—modesty !

The young knight was himself in a great measure reconciled to his misfortune, when he discovered, that though the brightness of his own reputation might be tarnished thereby, the lady, the peerlessness of whose maiden charms he had

undertaken to maintain, was no loser by the event: and now, by her command, the conqueror and the conquered, again shook hands together; and retired each to his tent, to prepare himself for the tournament, which the late jousts had unexpectedly interrupted. In this, the most imposing and important of all chivalric spectacles, Sir Jacques de Wilton retrieved the loss which his fair fame had sustained, and was once more declared victorious.

A grand *mélée*, in which the distinction of knight and squire was forgotten, followed the tournament, and brought to their conclusion the warlike, yet courteous and magnificent, sports of the lists of Morville castle; which by command of the noble and the knightly judges, were now formally dissolved. And, having partaken of the parting banquet provided for them by their liberal host, both actors and spectators took their departure from the merry scene, and carried with them into far or foreign lands, the fame of those gallant and romantic achievements, performed on the

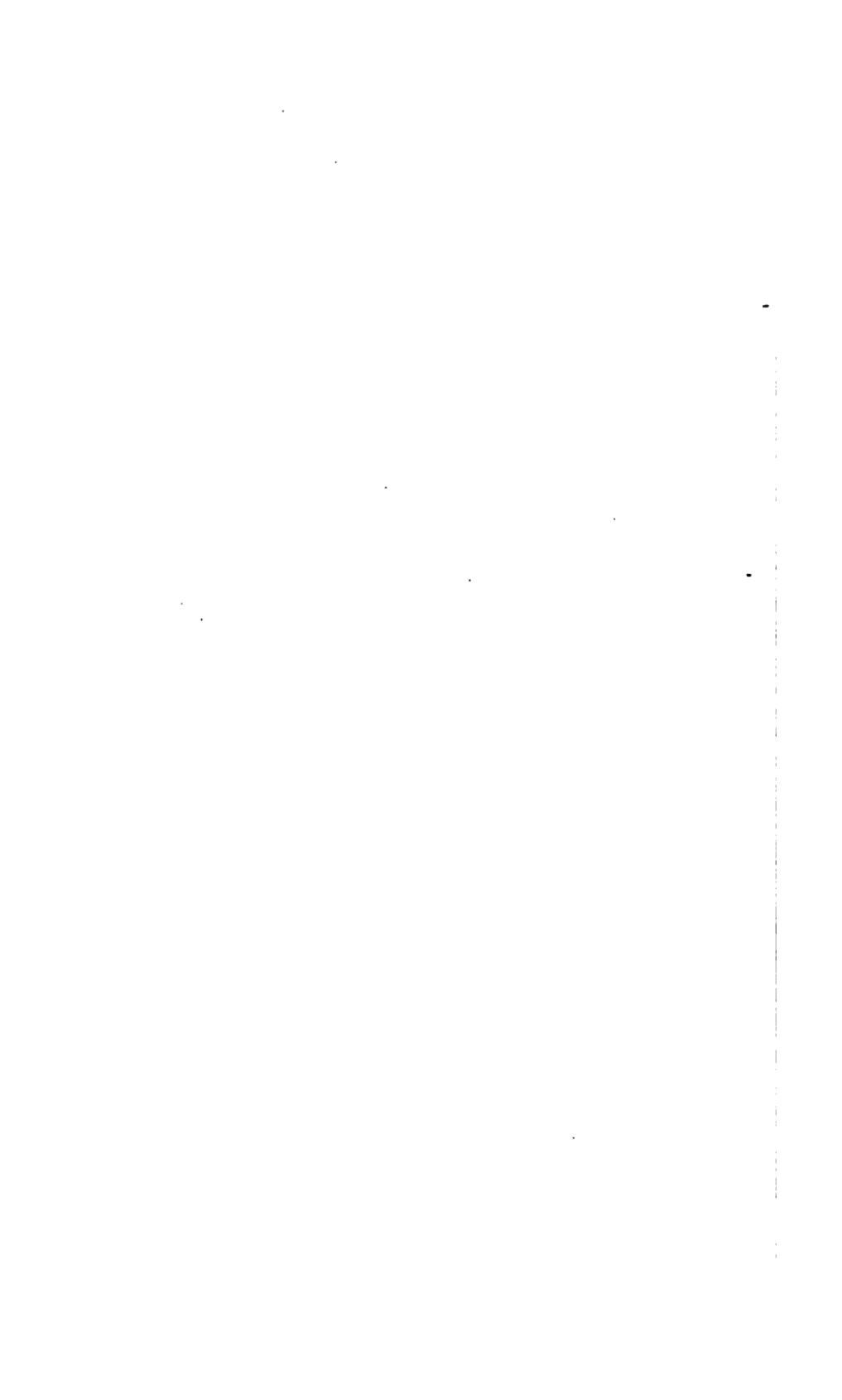
occasion of Sir Jacques de Wilton's being admitted to the honour of knighthood !

The union of Helen de Wilton with the gallant Saxon, Sir Edgar Ethelburg, took place a few days after the inauguration of her brother, who, confiding the care and protection of his castle to his new relation, laid aside the bright trappings and adornments of the tilt and the tourney—concealed the proud blazonry of his shield beneath a leathern housing—and arraying himself in the green livery of an errant knight, took his departure for foreign courts and distant lands, in quest of adventures, whereby he might acquire fresh honours and renown, and render himself by experience, a perfect chevalier !

And now, having fairly introduced our hero into the gay ranks of acknowledged knighthood, and shewn, that in his first essays he came off *sans peur*, and almost *sans reproche*, we shall leave him to pursue his knightly wanderings, and perilous adventures ; not doubting but it will be found ere long, that the events of his after life have

been put upon record, by some equally faithful chronicler, for the instruction and entertainment of that day and generation, which shall be fortunate enough to discover them, among the literary lumber of departed years !

THE
KNIGHT OF THE PLUMELESS HELM.



THE KNIGHT OF THE PLUMELESS HELM.

A TALE OF CHIVALRY.

Come Fate into the lists, and champion me to the' utterance.
Shakespeare.

ON the evening of the first of June, in the year 1280, being the ninth of the glorious reign of Edward Longshanks, a mail-clad knight and his gentle page, trotted side by side along the borders of one of those almost interminable forests which, despite the arbitrary decrees of the first and second Williams, still flourished in majestic grandeur over many parts of our island. Behind them the western horizon was glowing with all the gorgeous tints of gold, purple, and vermillion ; while the beams of the now invisible sun were radiating lovelily over half the heavens and the upper

regions of the earth, giving to every thing whereon they rested, or over which they passed, an air of Eastern and romantic splendour. Before them, on the other hand, the gossamer curtains of evening were slowly and regularly enveloping the different objects of creation in their fairy web, and giving to their thousand hues one dark and sober livery. The grass was already glittering with the falling dew; the woodbine was closing its snowy blossoms, which during the day had peeped like stars from beneath the thick foliage of the wild under-wood; and the blue-bell, and robin-in-the-edge, nodded in humble obedience to the passing zephyr, or what is equally probable, in token of adoration to the sparkling countenance of the celestial Venus, which might now be distinguished in the heavens above.

The outward appearance of the knight, was by no means calculated to strike dismay into the heart of the beholder: there was, indeed, something Quixotic about him, for which, without a knowledge of his history, it would have been diffi-

cult to account. His hauberk, which consisted of one of those chain dresses so famous in the annals of crusading chivalry, was covered with apparently long accumulated rust. His helmet, which for want of the lighter bacinet he was obliged constantly to wear, was in the same unknightly condition, and lacked, beside, its most distinguishing ornament—the white plume with which it was wont to be decorated. Its elaborate workmanship, however, intimated that its wearer was something more than an errant knight; and there was a *je ne sais quoi* about his port and bearing which, despite his outward ludicrous appearance, fully confirmed the impression. His gauntleted right hand grasped a lance of somewhat formidable length, whilst an empty scabbard hung suspended by a tarnished baldric upon his left thigh. Behind him was slung a shield which, though now dull and lustreless, had evidently in former days gleamed with transcendent brightness; and its centre was ornamented with the representation of an inverted crescent upon a spear's point, above

which the motto “*Bon coup*” was inscribed, and established beyond a doubt the fact of its having in its prouder days been wielded triumphantly over the consecrated plains of Palestine. Our hero’s jet-black steed, unlike himself, was in most excellent condition, and would have done honour to the renowned Launcelot du Lac, or the chivalrous Paladins of Charlemagne!

The youthful companion of our *preux chevalier*, rode upon a grey pony that looked more like a native of Plimlimmon, or Penmaen Mawr, than the well-trained palfrey of a gentle page. His dress was of dark brown, and in the front of a bonnet, which became him admirably well, rose a single heron’s feather; whilst a bag, containing a small Spanish guitar, in the handling of which the stripling was no novice, was secured by a leather strap across the shoulders, and rested upon the cantle of the saddle.

“ Come hither, boy,” said the knight, to his young fellow traveller, whose rude palfrey ambled silently beside the prouder war-horse of his mas-

ter. “ ‘Tis a houseless track that they have sent thee ; art sure that thou art right ?”

“ Sure, sir knight, that I follow the directions given me, but not sure that those directions are correct.”

“ I fear me, then,” added he of the plumeless helm, “ we must sleep to-night under the green-wood tree, with the sky for our canopy, and the green-sward for our bed : what sayest thou to that, my pretty page ?”

“ We’ve slept so oft of late, sir knight, upon a damp couch, that we need not, I think, be apprehensive of catching cold.”

“ Well said, and wittily, my boy ! The earth too is softer than a prison floor, and freedom may be set off against its other advantages. May thy next master’s favours teach thee to forget what thou hast suffered in my behalf ! Heaven will, doubtless, soon free thee from the service of Sir Gaston de Biagn.”

“ Heaven, I hope,” said the page, “ will at least keep me loyal ! and if my lord would but confide

to my keeping the secret of his grief, I vow by the shrine of à Becket I never will prove a traitor!" The tear stood in young Eric's eye, as he gave expression to his feelings, which the knight perceiving, once more addressed him.—

" He who dares call thee such, will do it at his peril, while Gaston de Biern has power to aid thee! Nor will I give thee any longer cause to think that I suspect thy loyalty: attend then, while I gratify thy wish. Eight years ago,—young as thou art, thou may'st perhaps remember it—my liege, the warlike Edward, wrested from my hold the fair possessions of my ancestors—I was branded with the foul name of rebel, unknighted, and imprisoned. Justice is sometimes deaf as well as blind.—Whilst our gallant sovereign tarried upon his return from Palestine, at the Sicilian court of Charles, his lady, Eleanor, received into her train the fairest and the proudest of the daughters of Britain: among them was one, whose matchless beauty fired my soul with love. I asserted successively the superiority of her

charms in the tourney and the joust, using all honourable means to merit her affection ; and not altogether in vain, if this memorial prove not the pledge of falsehood ;”—(here Sir Gaston, ungauntleting his hand, exhibited to his page a ring formed of a plaited lock of dark-brown hair, ornamented with a small bright topaz).—“ John de Langeville,” he continued, “ was my rival in the maiden’s love ; and jealous of the preference shewn me, resolved upon my ruin. He whispered vague rumours into Edward’s ear, touching my visits to the queen’s apartments ; and my liege lord, in the full presence of his knightly court, charged me with treason ! Indignant and enraged, I swore the charge was false, and in an unguarded moment, threw down the gauntlet at my accuser’s feet. Thereat the king, who brooked not this outrageous insult, bade those around disarm me ; but I felled to the earth the craven knights who sought to execute the royal mandate, and flying from the scene of my disgrace, arrived at home in safety. I prepared my castle for a stout

defence; but the united arms of England were too powerful for a Gascon knight to withstand. In a few days, the banner of St. George floated above my towers; I was deprived of my inheritance, and my sword, the proudest badge of knighthood; and immured, as thou knowest, in the dark dungeons of Winchester; from which, thank heaven, we have at length escaped! This day, so runs the rumour, the knightly sports of the Lord Mortimer, commence at Kenilworth, where, if my information be correct, the royal Edward should preside; him I am resolved to seek; and, either obtain his pardon, or fall beneath his lance. One day is already lost; but if fortune prove propitious, to-morrow's sun shall see me in the lists. Should imprisonment have so far unnerved my arm as to deprive me of the power of victory, and I fall, do thou preserve the ring which I have shewn thee; and should'st thou ever discover its lovely owner, restore it, and tell her that Gaston de Biern was foully belied, and parted with her gift but with his life.

The last glimmer of twilight had disappeared in

the west, and the twinkling stars became more visible overhead, as our travellers arrived at the termination of the forest; and looking before them perceived that they were about to enter a wild, and seemingly trackless waste. Here the knight reined up his steed, and the gentle Eric instantly followed his master's example.

“ If thou can’t now find thy path, my pretty page,” said Sir Gaston, “ thou art the cunningest guide in Christendom ! What sayest thou, boy ? By our Lady’s footstool ! but I think we had better remain in the green-wood till dawn ; or wilt thou still lead on ? ”

Eric declared himself unable to officiate as guide any longer ; and voted in the name of his jaded palfrey, that they should seek a night’s lodging in the shade of the forest. Looking around them, therefore, for a convenient spot to bivouac in, they distinguished at a short distance a majestic oak, whose wide-spreading branches promised them the shelter of which they were in search. Having dismounted, our hero rested his

lance against the tree, and hanging his shield upon the stump of one of its broken branches, and his helmet upon another, seated himself (tell it not ye minstrels—register it not ye chroniclers !) upon the bare ground !

“ Come hither, Sir Page,” said the knight, “ and give me one of thy soothing lays, for thou canst exercise thy minstrel art as well, I ween, under the greenwood tree, as within the walls of a prison.”—

With page-like alacrity the stripling proceeded to obey the command of his lord, and while he drew forth his lute from its covering, inquired what should be the subject of his song ; “ shall it,” said he, “ be ‘ Le bel Chevalier,’ or the ‘ Red-Cross Knight’ of Bernard de Ventadour ? ”

“ The latter,” murmured the weary knight. An Eric accordingly began the then favourite song of

THE RED-CROSS KNIGHT.

I.

THERE came a knight from Palestine, as brave a knight as e'er
Adventured forth for glory, or the love of Lady fair ;
Foremost in tilt and tournament, he loved to break a lance
With the gallant spears of England, or the chivalry of France :

The red cross on his burnished shield, had lost its glowing tint,
And deeply dyed in Moslem gore, assumed a sable print;
But his azure plume was dancing with the zephyrs of the plain,
As he pricked his noble war horse o'er the fields of Aque-
taine.

II.

“ Oh why such speed, oh why such speed, thou valiant Red-
Cross Knight !
Art thou bound for deadly battle, or the fields of mimic fight,
Where the blaze of beauty dazzles, and the merry minstrels
sing,
And the pointless spear is broken for the ruby and the ring ?
Or doth some wild adventure in a far and foreign land,
Implore the certain succour of thy never-vanquished hand ?
Or art thou hurrying onward with the chivalrous design
Of fulfilling pledge or promise to our Lady’s holy shrine ? ”

III.

“ Nor battle field, nor mimic fight, nor promise, pledge, or
vow,
Nor perilous adventure doth demand my presence now :
But my lady-love awaits me, in her perfume-breathing bower,
Herself the Rose of Beauty, its most captivating flower.—
I have seen the vaunted daughters of the proudest Moors of
Spain,
And the fairest maids of England ; but they cannot equal mine :
Nor lives there lady-love in France, as many a knight can tell,
May contest the palm of beauty with the lovely Isabel.

IV.

“ Though honour’s call compelled me erst to join the dauntless band
Of the lion hearts of England in the Holy, Holy Land ;
Yet wherefore should I tarry from my bright and beauteous maid,
Now the banner waves victorious of our far-renowned crusade ?
I’ve been kept too long already from the magic of her spell,
To loiter any longer now—so, stranger, fare you well ! ”
He said no’ more, but pricked his steed, impatient of delay,
And bounded with the fleetness of the antelope away.—

Thus far had our minstrel proceeded with his lay, when he perceived that the knight of the plumeless helm had already sunk into a profound slumber. Being himself not a whit less weary than his lord, he thought it would be much better to follow so laudable an example, than to continue his minstrelsy for his own amusement, or that of the mysterious beings who might be hovering unseen around him. Accordingly, he stretched himself upon the green-sward, and, resting his head upon a huge root of the old oak tree, which seemed to have started above ground for the express purpose of forming him a pillow, bade adieu

for a season to the “pomps and vanities of this wicked world.”

Gaston de Biern had the good fortune to live in those halcyon days, when Puck and Oberon, with the whole race of Robin-good-fellows, footed it merrily in the moonshine, undisturbed by the “march of intellect,” or the prying curiosity of science: when every oak had its sylvan deity, and every green field its midnight, though invisible revellers, who traced their magic circles in the grass, or shed their blessings, like the falling dew, upon their numerous and faithful worshippers; now bestowing upon the dauntless knight an invulnerable shield, or tempering his glaive in the dark and secret caverns of the earth;—and anon, disdaining not to reward the diligence of the house, or dairy maid, with a sparkling silver six-pence, dropped cunningly into her shoe while she slept—

But now, alas ! they all are dead,
Or gone beyond the seas,
Or farther for religion fled,
Or else they take their ease !

No sooner had Morpheus sealed the eyes of our hero and his attendant, than the Elfin beings above alluded to, knowing by intuitive perception that they had nothing to fear from a sleeping knight and his stripling page, ventured from their unknown retreats, and round their favourite oak commenced their airy and fantastic gambols. First came their princely leader, and having with his moonbeam-like wand traced a circle round the tree, sufficiently spacious to inclose our sleepers within it—he sounded his merry bugle—a spotless woodbine flower—and gave the signal for his fellows to advance. Immediately the whole band rushed into the ring, which became intensely brilliant with the unceasing coruscations of light emitted from the ten thousand tiny revellers, one of whom, who seemed to be the minstrel of the Elfin quoir, seizing upon the neglected lute of the unconscious page, instantly, and without waiting to ascertain its musical powers, began the following irregular

SONG.

MERRILY, cheerily, spirits that shun
The garish light of the noonday sun,
And gaze of mortal eye ;
The grass is wet with the sparkling dew,
And the stars are looking about for you,
As they wander along through their fields of blue,
Bright fairies of the sky !

Come to the revel with dance and glee,
Ye that reside in the green-wood tree,
And you who dwell below,
In secret grottos, and gem-lit mines,
Where the ruby glares, and the diamond shines,
And footstep of mortal ne'er marred those designs
Which only fairies know !

Behold a knight in the holy shade
Of your favourite oak is sleeping laid—
Sweet may his slumbers prove !
His dreams, be they all of martial guise,
And the conqueror's wreath, where beauty's eyes
Enhances the worth of the glittering prize,
And fires the soul with love !

Sleep on, Sir Knight, you have nought to fear
From the blunted sword, the pointless spear,
Of tilt or wild mêlée ;
Princes to-morrow shall envy thy crown,
And sigh for a lance to equal thine own,
In knightly achievements and deeds of renown,
'Mid valour's proud array !

Fare ye well, fare ye well, lance and sword,
The warning voice of the night's own bird,
That speaks of coming day,
Summons us hence to the peaceful realm,
Where pleasures unceasing all cares o'erwhelm,
Then fare ye well, Knight of the Plumeless Helm,
Spirits, away, away !

While the fairy musician exercised his scientific skill, a host of his companions, which it would have baffled the cunning of the sage John Dee to have exhibited, in the best Venice glass he ever possessed, joined in the song, whilst they danced about neck over heels like motes in the sunbeam, evidently enjoying their orderless pranks with infinite satisfaction. The dreary too-whoo of Minerva's bird however, at length, put a stop to their joyous revelry, and they disappeared *instanter*, with a loud whistling kind of noise, leaving no trace behind them, save that of the bright green circle in which they had gambolled, and from which the dew had been brushed by the action of their nimble feet. Almost at the self-same instant the Gascon knight, whose dreams ap-

peared to have been of that "martial guise" invoked for him by his late visitors, started from his repose, exclaiming, "Honour to the sons of the brave!" He, however, soon found that he was neither witnessing the gallantry of others, nor dressing his own spear for the knightly rencontre, for his hand struck against the nose of his "berry-black steed," which, having quietly approached the ear of its lord, was doubtless whispering therein some "gentle hint," and had thus been the unconscious cause of his fancying he heard the spirit-stirring note of the herald of the lists. The sudden effort awoke him, and as the frightened steed started back from the effect of his unexpected salutation, Sir Gaston sprung upon his feet, and seized the pendant bridle. Having now partly recovered from his dreams, he gazed about him, like a man who has missed something but cannot recollect what; he, however, soon satisfied himself that all he had lately witnessed was but the "visions of the brain." Turning his eyes eastward, he perceived that the heavens there-

abouts were assuming a greyish tinge, which he very naturally concluded to be the *avant courier* of the coming morn, notwithstanding the extreme brilliancy of the starry hosts which above and around him still studded the ethereal vault. The light which these emitted, was just sufficient to enable him to descry the objects in his more immediate neighbourhood ; and of these the first which attracted his notice, was the form of his little foot page calmly reposing beneath the shadow of their luxuriant pavilion.

“ Soho, Sir Page ! ” exclaimed the knight, “ arise, and get thee ready boy, or I shall leave thee to thy dreams and the company of the fairies ; for, by our lady’s footstool, they have been footing it merrily upon the greensward to night ! ”

Obedient to the well-known voice, Eric instantly sprung upon his feet, and devoutly crossed himself, for he, too, as well as his lord, soon recognised the well-known traces of the Peris of the North. De Biern resumed.

“ Well, my pretty page, art thou inclined to

turn guide again to-day? Or wilt thou resign the office to fortune, and the cunning of thy gentle palfrey?"

"I place, Sir Knight," was the reply, "but little faith in the skill of my grey; but as we were told that Kenilworth lay to the north, we had best not seek it at least in *that* direction, (pointing to the east) for *there* the dawn seems breaking."

"Most excellent adviser," said the knight, "be it as thou say'st, and if the beldame, Fortune, prove but kind for once, I forbode no evil from this day's adventure. But come! get thee ready, boy, for behold the east is brightening rapidly!"

"Oh, fear not fortune, my lord!" said the stripling, with a burst of joy, "see, here is an earnest of her future favours!" So saying, he held up to the view of the astonished knight, a sword, whose extreme beauty and polish might have rivalled the famed Escalaber. "Thanks to our visitors, this glorious boon, my lord, has not been sent you for nought: no, no, believe me, it promises better things!"

Gaston de Biern scarcely knew what to think of this strange adventure; but perceiving that the sword was indeed a thing that would bear handling, he grasped the proffered hilt, which, however, he had no sooner done, than he exclaimed, “By St. Jago, ‘tis my own good sword! my Vraie acier!” Then, after gazing upon it for the space of several minutes, and kissing the highly-polished blade with all the fervent devotion of a true warrior of the thirteenth century, he placed it in his hitherto empty scabbard. Calling for his lance and shield, they were forthwith produced, and his wonder was still further increased on perceiving that both had undergone a most unaccountable change. The point of the former glittered in the twilight like one of the stars overhead, and the latter was in perfect keeping with it; nor rust, nor stain, was to be seen upon its now mirror-like surface. His helmet too had also undergone a similar improvement, and, in short, every piece of armour he possessed was as bright as if it had only just left the hand of the

polisher. So that, thanks to the fairies ! Sir Gaston de Biern might have now passed muster with the Paladins of Charlemagne, or the Knights of the Round Table !

“ By the shrine of à Becket,” said he, as he gazed upon himself, “ but I think I am enchanted ! Whither hast thou brought me, sirrah ? Dost thou see ? Dost thou know me, hey ? ”

At the name of à Becket, Eric devoutly crossed himself again—then with a smiling look, replied to the interrogation of his lord : “ I think, Sir Knight, you should be Sir Gaston de Biern of Gascony ; but when the sun rises I shall be better able to determine. In the mean time suppose we commence our journey, for the morning air blows chill.”

Our hero was no less anxious to set forward than his page, not doubting but that if he was, indeed, under the influence of fairy spells, they would be dissolved by the first brook that Fortune might throw in his way : besides, being a stranger, and in a strange land, he was fearful another

night might overtake him, without his reaching the goal of his desires, namely, "La Table Ronde," of the Baron Mortimer, with its accompanying chivalric sports, at which his sovereign lord Edward the First was to preside, and assisted by the beauteous Alice, daughter of his noble host, to award to the successful knights of the Tournay and the Joust the well-earned meed of victory. Having pronounced a benediction upon the invisible beings who had been so bountiful to him during his sleep, the Knight of the Plumeless Helm clapped spurs to his steed, and accompanied by his faithful attendant, trotted away from the scene of his late mysterious adventure.

His fears with respect to his being under the influence of some more than mortal power, were dispelled long ere sunrise; for, by that time, he had crossed more than one running stream, which, as is well known, was the infallible test of all Elfin spells. For many a weary mile our travellers continued their course over verdant fields and barren moors, without meeting with

any thing by which they might ascertain if they were in the right or in the wrong road. At length, however, about the hour of noon, they found themselves, to their no small joy, upon the king's highway, the broken and shattered state of which bore ample testimony to the great traffic which it had very recently experienced. "Ha! ha!" ejaculated the knight, delighted with the discovery, "by our lady's sepulchre, but we've found the road at last! and if I can read these footprints aright, the place we are in search of lies yonder, to the left." This remark was accompanied with a corresponding motion on the part of both "man and horse." The former rising in his stirrups, adjusted himself afresh, and pricked the latter into a more sprightly pace; an example which his juvenile squire, who now no longer acted in the responsible capacity of guide, was not slow to follow.

The hope-inspired surmise, that they were now drawing near to their journey's end, tended materially to increase their speed, and infused fresh

life into their drooping frames. After continuing in their new line of march about half an hour the well-trained steed of the Gascon knight stopped short for a moment in his course, pricking up at the same time his attentive ears, in token of their having recognised some familiar and congenial sounds, although hitherto his equally attentive rider had not distinguished any note sufficiently spirit-stirring to affect the exquisitely sensitive feelings of knighthood ; but he had considerable faith in the ears of his Rosinante, and therefore prepared himself for the long sought rencontre. Unstimulated either by whip or spur, the latter mended his pace, and thereby forced the shorter-legged palfrey of Eric into a brisk canter. In a short time our hero was gladdened with the sight of the advance-guard pennon, near which a rude barrier was thrown across the road, and obstructed his farther advance.

“ Whither bound ?” demanded the rough voice of a stalwart yeoman, whose badge of service bespoke him to be of the king’s household.

“To the Tournay,” was the laconic reply. “Then know, sir knight, that thou canst not pass this road to day, unless thou resolvest to contest the Passage of arms with England’s doughtiest knights.”

“I thank thee for the intelligence,” replied the fairy-favoured lord of the shield and lance; “but I fear them not. Remove the barrier.” Such an adventure was, indeed, of all others, what Gaston de Biern most ardently wished for; and accordingly, as soon as the obstruction was removed, he proceeded on his way.

Scarcely had he cleared this advance-guard barrier, when his ear was assailed by a loud flourish of trumpets, indicating evidently some movement among the assembled chivalry; this was occasioned, as he afterwards ascertained, by the departure of that personage whose presence he most courted—the king of England! Edward, willing to confer a mark of honour upon his princely entertainer, had vested in him, for the remainder of the day, the office of judge of the

knightly contests, while he himself retired from the bustle of the lists, to the quiet of the royal pavilion, from which place the spot selected for the Passage of arms was distant about five miles. In a few minutes our hero reached the pendant shields of the six champions, who had undertaken its defence against all comers. As the blazonry of the whole was alike unknown to him, he directed the point of his lance to the first on the row. Five golden lozenges upon a field *gules*, informed the learned in the science of heraldry, that it belonged to the descendant of the renowned conqueror of Brecknock, Bernard Newmarch, uterine brother of the still more renowned conqueror of England. Roger Newmarch, its present possessor, was a young knight of great promise and increasing fame, and who had, in the sports of the preceding day, been thrice declared victor. “But the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong!”

The Gascon's choice was speedily made; he was hailed by the loud and simultaneous shouts

of his gallant compeers, who were all anxious to put their valour to the proof. The tilting ground was forthwith cleared—the gorgeously arrayed heralds gave voice to their glory-breathing clarions, whilst the squire of the Norman knight reached down from its exalted station, the challenging shield of his lord and master!

Every thing was speedily arranged, and the noble Mortimer having taken his seat, the marshal of the course summoned the combatants to prepare themselves to put their courage and skill to the test of practice. The odds were decidedly against our adventurer; for, besides being unknown, he was encumbered with heavy arms of real warfare, while his rival for renown glittered in the lighter and more splendid habiliments of the tourney. But though aware of his disadvantage in this respect, he refused the offer of the marshal to furnish him with arms and armour better suited to the nature of his present emprise; and, the protecting *cronal* having been properly fixed to the point of his lance, he took his

appointed stand, to await the necessary signal, with all the proud and graceful bearing of an experienced knight. Anon, the trumpets sounded the charge, and the jousters dashed forward with gallant impetuosity. By an unfortunate stumble of our hero's steed, his lance missed its object, and the first course consequently redounded to the honour of his antagonist. Not so the next; for while he skilfully avoided the thrust of the Norman spear, his own well-directed stroke came in contact with the corslet of the latter, and the loser of the first, was declared the victor of the second course. The trumpets now sounded the third and last charge; and fortune again declared in his favour. With rare, but truly chivalrous dexterity, he broke away the rest of his opponent's lance, which thereby swerving from its direct line, struck him traverswise, and was broken upon the bow of his saddle.

“*Bon coup, Sir Knight of the Plumeless Helm!*” exclaimed the marshal and the officers at arms, and the cry was triumphantly echoed by all, save

the partisans and attendants of the vanquished Newmarch. The heart of young Eric bounded for joy, and his voice was raised to its highest pitch, in swelling the chorus of his master's praise.

Sir Gaston de Biern seemed, indeed, the only person who was not affected by the issue of the encounter. He kept his seat, unmoved, waiting till the bustle had subsided; when, again advancing to the pendant shields, he guided his rocketed spear to that of Sir Gerhard Neville, a knight of untarnished reputation in the annals of real, if not of chivalric contests. With soldier-like alacrity, Sir Gerhard prepared to meet his unknown challenger; but in the conflict was equally unfortunate with his predecessor. Victory the second time also declaring in favour of our hero, who twice more contended for the honour of passing the imaginary barrier, and with equal success. Again he rode up to the two remaining shields, one of which he was about to touch, when the judge of the lists flung down his warder, and announced that the Passage of

arms had already been won by the knight of the Plumeless Helm !

This event produced no small sensation among the lords of the shield and lance, and a thousand guesses were formed as to who the stranger knight could be, not one of which, as may readily be supposed, proved correct. The herald solicited his name, but in vain. The conqueror determined upon remaining incognito if possible, until the result of the next day's adventures would, he hoped, enable him to declare himself to some purpose. He, however, refused not the tent assigned to him by the lord of Kenilworth, near those of his glory seeking companions, in which with his loyal and delighted page he spent the night, whilst his less successful rivals crowded round the romantic table of their noble host, each eagerly asserting the superior beauty of his lady-love, or vowing to remove, on the morrow, the foul stain which the shield of English knight-hood had received from an unknown lance.

The morrow came, and with it all the din of

preparation for the next and most important act of the tournament. With the first appearance of dawn, the ropes which parted the lists were tightened, and the pages and squires were actively employed in passing to and fro, and in making the necessary arrangements for the coming display. As the regent of the day advanced on his celestial course, the voice of the trumpet summoned the spectators to their places ; princes and nobles came forth at its bidding, apparelled in all the magnificence of crimson and gold ; while ladies, "beautiful as the sun," and smiling as a morning of May, proved equally obedient to the well known call. First among the fair ones came the bright-eyed Alice, accompanied by her noble sire and his royal guest. "La Reine de Beauté et des amours" took her seat beneath a splendid canopy of crimson tapestry, the brilliancy of whose hues reflected a rosy tinge upon her otherwise pale complexion—she appeared in some degree indisposed ; her eye—the soul's true index—though naturally sparkling and bright,

even to a proverb, was wanting in both lustre and vivacity. There was, indeed, a lack of spirit in her whole air, indicating some inward feeling, at variance with outward appearances ; which, however, was not much to be wondered at, seeing that, where so many were contending for the honour of her hand, it might so happen that she would be required, in consonance with the spirit of the age, to bestow it upon *one*, while her affections were placed upon *another*.

Upon the right hand of the fair daughter of Sir Roger Mortimer, stood the dauntless king of England ; to the point of whose lance was attached the crimson pennon of the Queen of Beauty, denoting its present possessor to be the Knight of Honour. Upon a signal given by this badge of indisputable authority, the heralds blew their trumpets, and the pursuivants at arms commanded the anxious knights to “ come forth ! ” Immediately the lists presented as proud and gorgeous a display as ever was feigned by the wildest of oriental fancies, with all its splendid and romantic

adjuncts of genii and enchanters to boot. The gallant aspirants for fame passed in review before the throne, bowing as they were in duty bound to do, to her by whom it was occupied, and from whose fair hand each hoped to receive, ere long, the meed of victory. Like compliments were also paid by the knights to the more immediate objects of their choice, who, ranged in "burning rows," in the well-constructed amphitheatre above, watched with anxious solicitude the movements of their chivalric worshippers; and by the soul-inspiring glances of their eyes, urged them on to the performance of deeds of noble daring. But among all the proud and glittering champions who appeared in the lists, the Knight of Honour sought in vain for the wearer of the Plumeless Helm, the tale of whose achievements on the preceding day had reached the royal ear, clothed in the glowing colours of romantic exaggeration. But while Edward was excited by curiosity alone, the breasts of others were agitated by hope and fear, and many a keen eye was

turned, through the loop-hole of the vizor towards the tent of the mysterious stranger, into which courtesy and the laws of knighthood forbade an entrance. Fortunately, we are possessed of the very cap which the love-sick Hassan pilfered from the quarrelsome urchins of the renowned island of Wakwak*, and therefore, being under no necessity of observing these punctilious regulations, we can enter the tent without fear of detection.

“How goes the field?” inquired its noble tenant, of his page, squire, and messenger—for Eric was each and all by turns, and replied to the question of his master with becoming brevity.

“The spectators already crowd the scaffolding.—The Queen of Beauty hath taken her seat—upon her left stands her sire, the brave Lord Mortimer, while on her right the king waves the pennon of the Knight of Honour. Below, in the lists, all is bustle and array—the impatient knights have already bowed before the throne, and I left

* See New Arabian Nights, vol. 2. The Tale of “Hassan of Bassora.”

them arranging themselves for the encounter; so that in a short time the trumpets will doubtless sound for the onset.”—

As the last words passed his lips the martial peal was heard; whereat our hero, starting from his seat, was about to poise his formidable spear; but his faithful squire interposed. “Not so, not so, my lord—the marshal hath sent to the Knight of the Plumeless Helm weapons better suited to the courteous assaults of the tourney, and requests him to lay aside the sword and lance of battle field, and enter the lists armed with these *glaives courtois*.”

Here the speaker presented him with a sword and lance duly prepared for the bloodless sports which it was intended should be performed; but instead of receiving them, he laid his hand upon the hilt of his own trusty falchion, and exclaimed, “No, by our lady’s footstool! I will not change my Vraiacier for the best glaive in Christendom! Thinkest thou, boy, the Elfin spirits by whom it was restored, intended I should part with it so

lightly?—Yet, stay! 'twere best, perhaps, I should first be sure that 'tis indeed my own good sword." And so saying, he drew the beaming weapon from its sheath, and proved its metal against the oaken pillar upon which his arms had hung during the night. At one stroke it severed in twain the opposing substance, hard as it was, with as much each as the falchion of Velint—the thrice-tempered Minning, cleft the armour-clad body of the unfortunate smith who challenged its master to a trial of skill. After which, our knight returned it to its scabbard, fully satisfied of its identity.

The bustle and shouting which almost instantly followed the clarion's spirit-stirring notes, announced to Sir Gaston de Biern that the moment of trial was at hand. "Away, my pretty page," said he, "and bring hither my steed.—Quick quick, for the jousters will close in an instant." Eric bounded off like a roe to execute his master's bidding—though altogether at a loss to conceive what motives could possibly have induced him thus to delay his appearance in the lists until the

contest had begun. But this was evidently nothing more than a cunning manœuvre, to escape the inquisitive eye of his offended sovereign, which he could not have done had he mingled with the combatants ere the tumult and confusion, necessary to the most orderly conducted conflict, had commenced. When informed that his courser was waiting, he hastened to the entrance of his pavilion, armed with the blunted lance ; thus in part complying with the wish of the marshal, and the courteous laws of chivalry ; while his good sword still hung beside him. He now vaulted into the saddle, and carracoled his steed to the barrier, within which he was immediately admitted ; when, dressing his lance to its rest, he dashed forward into the very thickest of the mêlée, while the loud shouts of the spectators gave notice to those more actively engaged, of the presence of the Knight of the Plumeless Helm ; and, mingling with the braying of the martial music, and the din of the mail-clad combatants, produced an uproar which made the very welkin ring again.

“ By our sword and sceptre!” said the king, addressing his noble host, “ but yonder knight bears himself gallantly.—See! see, my Lord!—By St. George he’ll unhorse *our* favourite—and *thy* future son-in-law.—There, my brave Mortimer, said I not so?”

The monarch was, indeed, right—Sir Gaston de Biern having succeeded in overthrowing his antagonist, though the doughtiest knight in the lists; and one whose prowess and good fortune had often been the theme of minstrel song in hall and lady’s bower. Some over-ruling power appeared, however, upon the present occasion, to have directed him in the selection of the lance which of all others he had most reason to shun, and the knight whom he had most deeply injured; for the vanquished warrior proved to be no other than John de Langeville, the rival of our hero’s early love, and the original cause of his late long and painful imprisonment.

When the knight of the Emerald Shield (so called from the cognizance of its lord’s being

a hart lodged on a field *vert*,) was borne so unexpectedly to the ground, a shout partaking more of surprise than either of applause or disapprobation burst simultaneously from the dense throng of spectators, and so startled many of the less-experienced combatants, who were too intent upon their own adventures to pay much attention to those of others, that it became absolutely necessary to suspend the conflict. The Knight of Honour accordingly gave the requisite signal, and the cry of “*à l'ostelle, à l'ostelle!*” was so effectually raised by the well-practised heralds and officers at arms, that the most ardent and impetuous paused in their career, and retired to their respective stations. The Baron Mortimer started forward to the front of the gallery, and even his fair daughter could not refrain from advancing a few steps, to ascertain by ocular demonstration if her intended “lord and master” had indeed been vanquished, as well as perhaps to obtain a glimpse of the fortunate victor.

De Langeville's fall was more dishonourable

than dangerous, yet the sudden and unexpected shock so stunned his bodily and mental powers, that he was borne by his friends, among the most active of whom was Mortimer, into an adjoining tent, in a state of comparative insensibility ; while his victorious rival was forced by those around him into the presence of the King of England and the Queen of Beauty, before whose exalted throne he bowed in token of dutiful obeisance, without, however, removing from his head the casque which had become so distinguished for the valour and prowess of its wearer, and so talked of for its own singularity.

“Sir Knight of the Plumeless Helm,” said the royal judge, “welcome to the lists of Kenilworth ! thrice welcome, though the flower of English chivalry hath fallen beneath thy lance ! Knewest thou whom thou hast vanquished ?”

“John de Langeville,” replied the conqueror, “a false and craven knight, as I will prove to the utterance ! There lies my gage !” and so saying he flung down his gauntlet.

Edward was surprised at the apparent audacity and boldness of the knight, at the same time that he admired his bravery and prowess, and would fain have urged him to revoke his challenge; but as consistently with his knightly character he could not dictate to a brother in arms, he referred to the lady arbitress to know whether or not it was her good will and pleasure to permit a challenge à l'outrance to be given or received within the limits of her jurisdiction. Though the beauteous Alice, 'tis true, was unprepared for this appeal, she betrayed greater agitation when called upon to pronounce judgment upon the point, than could fairly be supposed to have arisen from an occurrence by no means uncommon in those days of tilts and tournaments, when the word of woman was in very many cases the only law to which man paid a willing obedience.

“Let not the pastimes of peace, Sir King, be turned into those of war!” was her laconic reply, but it was imperative; and with this sovereign message the Knight of Honour returned to the

challenger, but he returned too late to effect its peaceful purpose. Whilst he parleyed with *La Reine*, some over-officious friend of Sir John de Langeville had taken up the gage, and carried it to the challenged hero, who having partly recovered from his stupor, and finding himself uninjured by his late fall, swore by the faith and honour of a knight to accept the cartel. He accordingly commanded his armorial ensign to be removed from the entrance of his tent, and dispatched an esquire with his mortal defiance to the Knight of the Plumeless Helm. All attempts at pacification being now at an end, it only remained to announce the names of the combatants, and to prepare for the perilous engagement.

In compliance with the demand of the herald to be furnished with his name, the Gascon hero, as he slowly unlaced his helmet and removed it from his head, gave the required information:—
“Gaston de Biern,” said he,—

“Gaston de Biern?” repeated the king, in an interrogative tone of mingled anger and surprise.

The name acted like a talisman, and “ Gaston de Biern !” was re-echoed by the surrounding chivalry with similar expressions of wonder and astonishment, while from the lips of a few, the ominous exclamation of “ treason ” escaped.

“ Treason by the rood !” exclaimed Edward ; “ but it shall never be said of Kiing Henry’s son that he sheltered his sovereignty behind the shield of ~~his~~ knighthood.” Then, with a look and air of kingly haughtiness, he addressed himself to the knight : “ Gaston de Biern, the lists are free for you to combat in !”

“ Nay, but my liege,” rejoined the latter, “ ‘tis not enough ; as a victor in the tournament and joust, I claim a boon !” Edward waved his pennon in token for the speaker to proceed : and he did so. “ For eight long years, my liege, have I been imprisoned under the foul, false charge of treason. Sir John de Langeville knows the charge is false ; and this good sword shall force him to confess ere long, that it was he alone provoked me to rebellion, or if it does not, let me die

degraded and disgraced ! But ere I stake my life to this adventure, I would fain know if, 'mid the throng of beauty which I see, there be not one at least who will grant me her support ? My liege, there was a bright-eyed damsel once whose love I won, as this long-cherished pledge can testify ; I would now restore it her if she mistrusts the justness of my cause. Come hither, boy : go, bear this jewel to the Queen of Beauty !”

At these words, the watchful Eric stepped forward to receive the ring which his master held forth to him, and advancing to the fair judge of the lists, laid it at her feet. The lovely Alice, who, while the foregoing colloquy was held, became so agitated as to require the utmost exertions of her fair friends and attendants, to prevent her from being overpowered by her emotions, received the proffered relic, and kissing it with all the devotion and enthusiasm of true and unalterable love, restored it again to the page, and immediately concealed her blushing countenance in her richly wrought kerchief, while the overjoyed knight

received the pledge, and retired, unquestioned and uninterrupted from the throng of his chivalrous companions, who were too much surprised at what they beheld, to do aught save gaze in silence at their fortunate brother in arms. There was, indeed, no small cause for surprise; and all were equally at a loss to conceive what could possibly have induced the plighted bride of Sir John de Langeville to bestow so distinguishing and so unequivocal a mark of her affection upon the man who in a short time was to meet him in the deadly recontre.

The officers at arms soon however aroused the champions from their stupor, by commanding them to withdraw, in order that the lists might be prepared for the approaching combat; and during the interval they were so occupied, conjecture was busy as to its probable results. The Lord Mortimer, altogether unable to account for his daughter's late conduct, and indignant at seeing his parental authority so little regarded, expostulated with the agitated maiden in no very

knightly terms : unrestrained even by the presence of royalty itself, and swore by à Becket's shrine, that if any harm happened to the knight whom he had selected for her future Lord, " he would send her forthwith to a nunnery !" . She herself was alike insensible to his menaces and his anger ; and many a gallant scion of chivalry laughed in his sleeve at the enraged baron, well knowing that the bright-eyed Alice would never be long immured in a convent's walls, while so many brave lords of the lance and sword were ready and anxious to devote themselves to her service.

By the hour of noon the necessary arrangements were completed ; and the amphitheatre became thronged with silent or with whispering spectators, all equally desirous and impatient to behold the display of true courage and knightly skill which was about to take place. As the contest was to be for life or death, many a timid damsel avoided the scene where it was to take place : among others, Alice Mortimer, though the most interested in its issue, quitted not her chamber ;

many a “little foot page,” however, took his station near the dais, in order to convey from time to time to his half-hoping, half-despairing lady, the intelligence of what was passing without. King Edward presided in the judgment seat; while the restless Lord of Kenilworth, now held a momentary parley with the marshal, and anon hastened to encourage his chosen knight, who was already cased in full panoply of steel and brass, and curbed in with difficulty his fiery steed, which, impatient as its rider for the onset, pawed the level ground, and covered its gilded bit with snow-white foam.

The martial trump was at length heard, and with its first note the Lord of the Emerald Shield bounded into the lists, and was loudly cheered by his friends and fellow nobles, as well as by all the gentles of the land. His early appearance inspired them with confidence, and occasioned his late defeat to be for the time almost forgotten; whilst on the other hand, the tardiness of his rival’s coming augured but little in his favour. The trumpet, indeed, had brayed forth its last notes,

ere Sir Gaston thought proper to enter the arena. His appearance had undergone no alteration, save that the lance of the courteous tournay, had been exchanged for the tough spear with which on the preceding day he had overcome the brave and knightly defenders of the passage of arms ; and that the bridle arm displayed his invulnerable and fairy-polished shield !

Expectation beamed in every eye, and silence flung a mystic charm round the scene, which, however, the monarch's signal in a moment dissipated. The onset note was sounded—the ropes were severed—and the combatants dashed forward in true knightly style. In the twinkling of an eye they met, but the shock proved issueless ; each having, at the same instant, and with equal skill, warded off his antagonist's lance, neither could boast of any advantage. The second course likewise only served to display the scientific dexterity of the assailants. For the third time they dressed their lances to their rests, and gave their steeds the rein. The shield of our hero

was again impenetrable, but that of his opponent proving false, gave free passage to the well-aimed thrust of the Gascon, and was fairly pinned to the corslet of its lord, who was also borne from his seat by the superior strength and prowess of his foe. As he fell upon the soft sand he received little or no injury by the fall, and recovered himself in an instant; while the cheering cry of "Honour to the sons of the brave!" bursting forth from the assembled thousands, inspired him with fresh vigour. The Knight of the Plumeless Helm dismounting, flung away his shield and advanced to meet his half-conquered rival, whose bright sword was already "beating the empty air" in token of proud defiance. The struggle on foot proved long and desperate; but was at last terminated by the fairy-gifted glaive, the Vraiacier, forcing its way through the brazen helmet of De Langeville; and, cleaving it in an oblique direction, it penetrated with the same blow through the shoulder greaves, and by the wound it made entirely disabled his sword arm from any further effort. The wounded

knight at the same moment fell all his length upon the earth, and the blood flowed profusely from both his head and shoulder. The victor, with soldier-like alacrity, unlaced the shattered helmet of his foe, and demanded as the price of life, a confession of his guilt and treachery. Almost unconscious of what he did, de Langeville complied with this demand:—"Heaven was with thee," he muttered: "Thine was the better cause."

"Enough, I ask no more!" said Sir Gaston de Biern, and thereupon with withdrew the threatening falchion from the naked and defenceless throat of his vanquished enemy. Then turning away, he presented himself before his sovereign and laid the sword of victory at his feet; while the squires and officers at arms bore off the bleeding knight to his pavilion, where the Leeches were already in attendance to apply their healing balsams to his wounds.

The conqueror was hailed with the greetings of a thousand tongues, and the clangor of a thousand warlike instruments; but disregarding both, and intent upon the primary object of his journey to

the round table of Kenilworth, he hastened to lay his plumeless helm near his Vraiacier, before the throne of the royal arbitrator of the chivalrous contests, and kneeling himself beside them, besought the pardon of his liege lord and master. Edward had a soul too noble and too princely, to cherish hatred or malice against a brother knight, or to allow any one to exceed him in an act of generosity. Rising therefore in his seat, with a grace of port and bearing which proclaimed him “every inch a king,” he replied to the request of the suppliant hero—“Sir Gaston de Biern, we have done you wrong; but, by the word and honour of a king, it shall be recompensed. What, ho! my lord of Mortimer! what sayest thou now to the Knight of the Plumeless Helm? Seekest thou a braver son-in-law? Or wilt thou still bestow the hand of the Lady Alice upon the vanquished John de Langeville?”

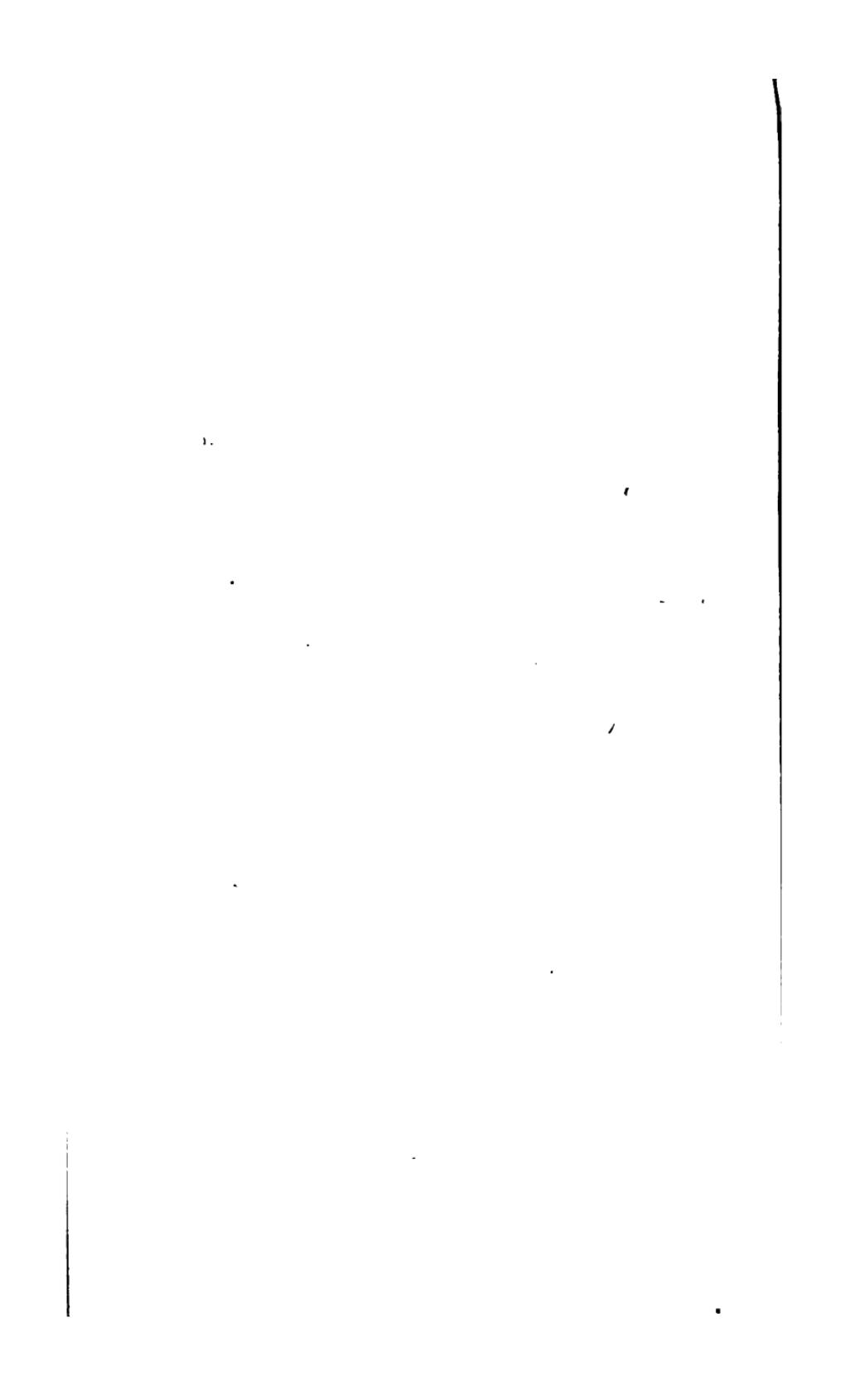
“My liege,” replied the proud, though now abashed baron, “never, while I live, shall a false and craven knight, if I am aware of it, quarter his

arms with those of Mortimer. The Lady Alice shall be free to choose."

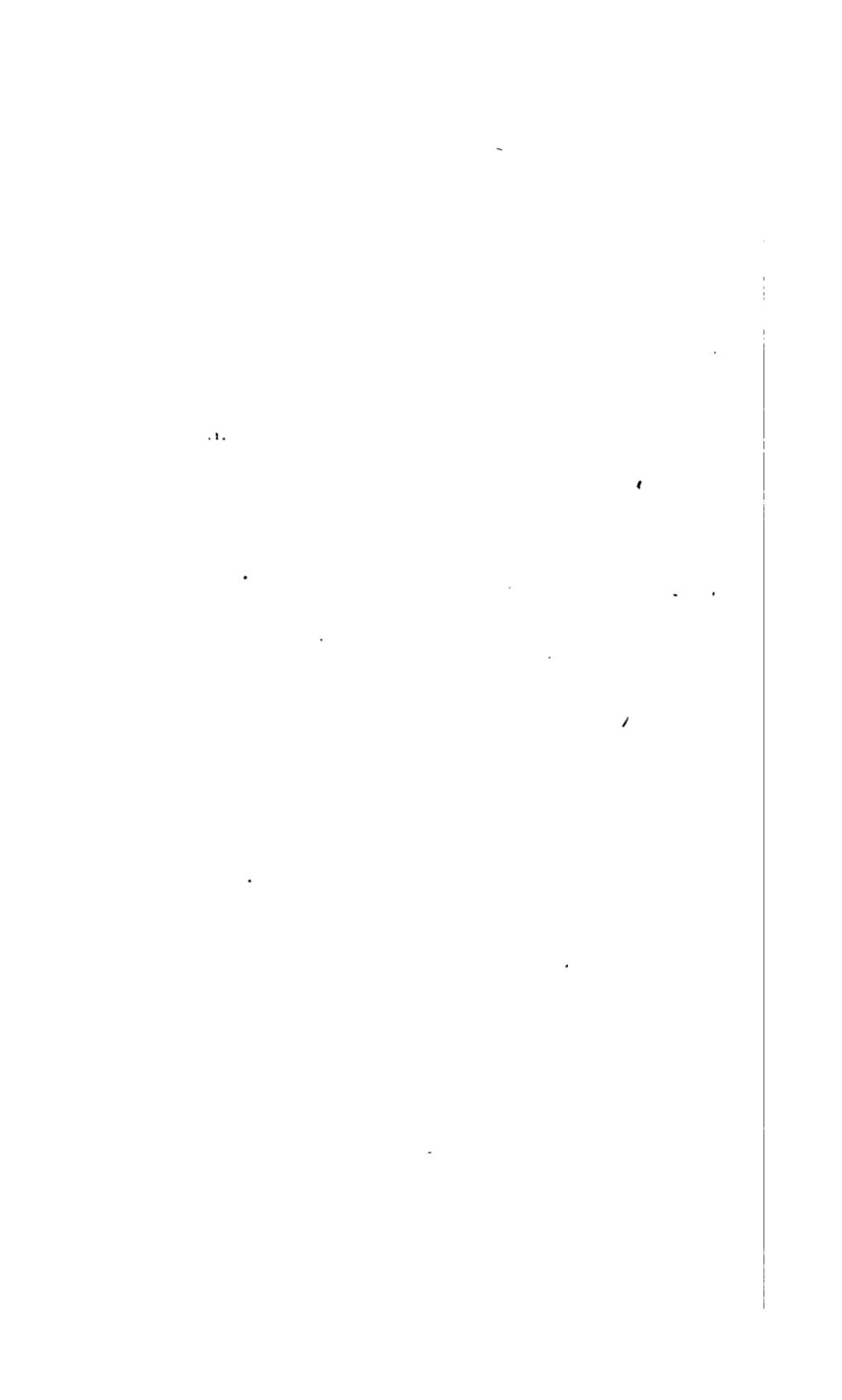
This every one knew was making a virtue of necessity; for, after the demonstrative proof of affection given by the damsel herself not many hours before, her choice was a riddle already solved. And on being appealed to upon the subject, she made no scruple in declaring that her first love should be her future lord.

At the banquet in the evening, our hero received from the hand of his betrothed bride, the rewards of valour which he had so well earned, and the next morning was blessed with the hand itself: his prince at the same time restored to him his hereditary possessions, and commanded that in future he should add to the quarterings of his shield, a Plumeless Helm, in remembrance of the renown which he had that day acquired as its wearer. Thus the sports of Kenilworth were concluded, as it was intended they should be, by a bridal, though by an unexpected but fortunate accident the bridegroom chanced to be changed.

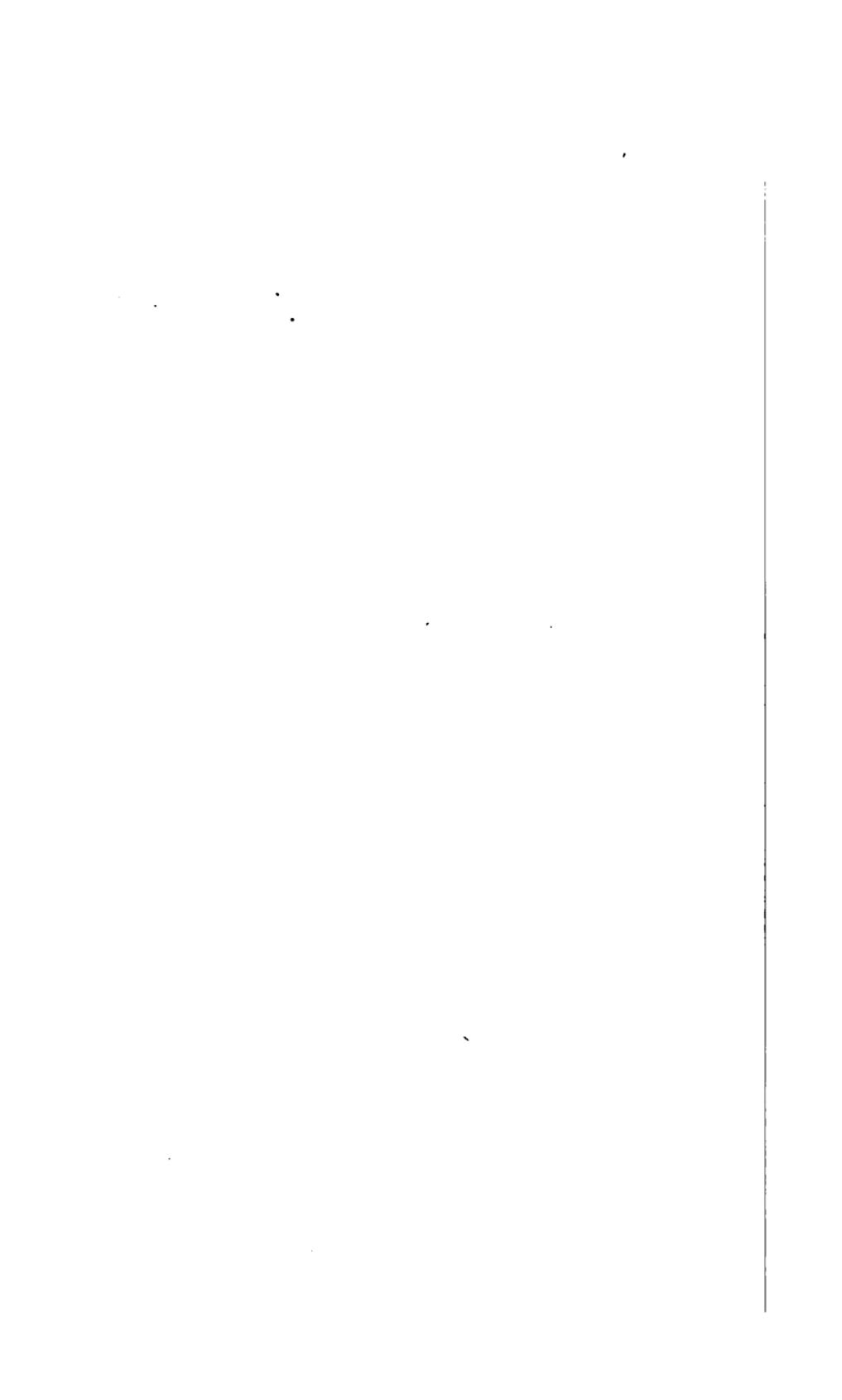
Young Eric was rewarded for his fidelity and attachment, by being made the favourite attendant upon the happy bride of his beloved master; who, returning to his native land, passed the residue of his days happily and honourably; and when gathered to his fathers, left a name behind him which shall endure till the waves of time wash away the glowing records of romantic chivalry, and with them the valorous achievements of the “Knight of the Plumeless Helm!”



EDMUND ESTERLING.



EDMUND ESTERLING.



EDMUND ESTERLING

A TRUE TRADITION.

Not all that heralds rake from coffin'd clay,
Nor florid prose, nor honied lies of rhyme,
Can blazon forth one evil deed, or consecrate a crime.

Byron.

“ Ay, ay, it’s a fair face on a foul deed!—but the grave hides all, and the marble tells tales for the dead with a better grace than the tongue does for the living !” Such was the strange and mysterious exclamation of our bald-pated guide, as I expressed my admiration of the elaborate workmanship and matchless beauty of the tombs of the Esterlings. But here he abruptly broke off; and, notwithstanding my earnest solicitations to be furnished with some particulars relating to those who slept beneath, he turned a deaf ear thereto, and

proceeded to point out the other objects of curiosity which the place contained. Having patiently borne him company round the church, paused where he paused, and listened when he spoke, I thought myself fairly entitled to be re-admitted into the final family bed-chamber of the proudest of Fitzhamon's knights, and with much ado obtained possession of the key ; upon which my surly conductor turned him to depart, leaving his son, an urchin of some twelve years old or so, to take care that all was left safely locked, when his troublesome visiter should think proper to feel himself satisfied, and withdraw. I soon contrived to conciliate the good will of my young companion, who excused his father's uncourteous departure, by informing me that he had to go a considerable distance to fetch his cows to be milked, and that he was already much beyond his time, and consequently trespassing upon the kindness of the fair dairy-maids of St. Donat's castle.

The apartment which I felt so anxious to re-examine, was a small chamber about eighteen feet

by twelve, adjoining to the church, from which it was entered by a narrow, but massy door. In the middle of the floor, rose the magnificent tomb of William de Esterling, whose full length figure in marble, once white, though now grown grey with time, cannot fail to call forth the admiration of every one who has a soul at all sensible to the beautiful and exquisite in art. At either end, those of John and Maurice Esterling, pointed out the spot where the bones of those worthies reposed; while the walls were crowded with monuments, each sacred to the memory of some noble scion of a now scionless tree! That, however, which more particularly attracted my attention, was a plain marble tablet, occupying a place exactly opposite one of the two grated windows, which admitted light into this silent dwelling place, and of which the following is a copy—

†

I. H. S.

HIC JACET.

E. ESTERLING.

OB.

MCCLXV.

The brevity of this inscription, when compared to the more pompous and studied epitaphs of its neighbour-tombs, made me curious to know something of the history of him for whom it had been erected; and as fortune would have it, while I was in the act of copying the above simple record, the good curate of the adjoining church made his appearance, and promised to gratify my curiosity.

“Sir,” said the reverend stranger, “that undecorated tablet which seems to have attracted your notice, bears the name of one, whose tale is not devoid of interest. When, twenty years ago, I came to officiate in this village, it was a current legend, and I employed my spare moments, during the long evenings of winter, in transcribing it with many others of a like description, into a book which I procured for that purpose, and which if you think it worth perusing, is at your service.”

As the reader will readily suppose, I immediately accepted of the kind offer of my new acquaintance, and accompanying him home to his

rural cottage, was rewarded for my pains with the manuscript from which I have now extracted the story of

EDMUND ESTERLING.

whose fate appears to have stood intimately connected with one of those turbulent events in which our history during the middle ages so plentifully abounds ; and refers to a time when, by a series of the most fortunate and daring exploits, a vassal was enabled to raise himself high above his lord, and to wrest from the pusillanimous grasp of our third Henry, the sceptre of dominion. Simon Montfort, Earl of Leicester, anxious to preserve an authority which, however popular, he well knew to be destitute of the support of right and justice, sought by all the means of which he was master, to enlist beneath his banners, the most powerful and warlike among the nobility, and for a season his endeavours proved successful. But the unlooked for rising of the Duke of Glo'ster, and the escape of Prince Edward, widely altered the state of his

affairs, and called upon him to make fresh exertions in order to retrieve his declining reputation. *Nil desperandum*, was however the motto of the haughty baron. He soon entered anew into a league with the Prince of Wales, and brought over to his interests many of the lords marchers, and of the noble and royal feudatories of the land ; and among the latter, he reckoned the great grandson of the bravest of Fitzhamon's knights. The glory of the house of Esterling was then at its zenith. Possessing a more extensive domain, and a more numerous retinue of followers, than any of his Norman neighbours, Sir Robert Esterling owned obedience to none save the king ; from whom, however, he made no scruple of transferring it when it suited his own pleasure or interest to do so. At the first breaking out of his rebellion, the wary Leicester had sought in vain to draw over to his party, the old Lord of St. Donat's. Maurice Esterling, more politic than his son and successor proved to be, had contrived to stand neuter during the whole of the long and arduous struggle which

took place between the earl and his monarch : In principle, firmly attached to the throne, he was only prevented from openly declaring himself in its favour, by the apparently hopeless condition of the royal cause. On the other hand, his great age served as an excellent excuse for his not taking up arms with those who sought its overthrow. Towards the close of the year 1264, the old Norman was called upon to balance his accounts with earth : and summoning to him his two sons, assigned to his first-born, Robert, the castle of St. Donat's, with all its fair possessions—while to Edmund, he bequeathed his blessing, with a hope, that one day he might win the love of the lady Cicely : at the same time, commanding both, by all that was sacred and holy in heaven, to continue faithful to the king, and to go forth with the golden quatrefoils of the Esterlings, whenever any of his alienated nobility, should unfurl again the royal standard ;—and having thus satisfied his conscience, the good Sir Maurice, was gathered to his fathers in peace.

The heir of St. Donat's had, like other aspiring young nobles of the day, spent much of his time with the armies of the Holy Land, where he learnt beneath the ablest masters, not only the art of war, but the crafty wiles of political intrigue. And it was during his absence in Palestine, that the daughter of the brave and loyal William de Londres, was confided to the care and protection of his father's house. The lord of Ogmore, at the very outset of Leicester's rebellion, had fearlessly attached himself to the party of the king, and as fearlessly fell in its defence; leaving the fair Cicely, the orphan heiress to all his proud baronial possessions, in the safe custody and guardianship of his old friend and fellow-soldier, Sir Maurice Esterling, whose youngest son, Edmund, taking advantage of the favourable opportunity thus afforded him, sought to gain the affections of his father's ward—nor sought in vain. The gentle Cicely heard with all maiden modesty his tale of love, and permitted him, uncontradicted, to revel in the prospect of one day being blessed

with her hand, and thereby inheriting the riches and the honours of the house of Ogmore. The old Norman knight had hitherto contemplated, well pleased, the mutual affection which grew up between his son and the fair daughter of William de Londres, since in it he perceived the means of putting the former in possession of a rich and splendid inheritance, while it left the hereditary estates of St. Donat's to descend untouched and entire to his elder brother, upon whose return from the Holy wars, it was intended the much desired union should take place. Little did the fond lovers imagine that this very event would disconcert all their schemes, and bring to nought the bright prospects of happiness in which they had suffered themselves to indulge—yet it was so.

With bray of trumpet, and with beat of drum, Robert de Esterling was heralded home to his native land, and hung up his shield in the hall of his forefathers, where the banquet of welcome awaited his arrival, and mirth and revelry ushered him into the presence of those to whom

he was dear. For the first time the warrior of the cross now heard related, the story of the orphan daughter of de Londres, and gazed upon its mournful subject, as she sat beside her plighted lord. The acknowledged heir of the Esterlings had in other lands beheld fairer forms, and with his fancy yet teeming with recollections of the voluptuous harems of the East, no wonder that he should be blind to the simple and unadorned beauties of his father's ward.

But though the stern soldier saw nothing to admire in the person of de Londres' daughter, yet the all-grasping spirit of the feudal chief could not help thinking, the fair lordship to which she was whole and sole heiress, a quarry well worthy his ambition ; and this called upon him to ponder awhile, ere he pledged himself to sanction with his presence, a ceremony which must for ever preclude the possibility of his attaining thereto. Ever fertile in pleas and excuses for gaining time, and thus delaying what he had not at once in his power to entirely prevent, he still contrived to get

the long contemplated nuptials put off from day to day, and week to week, until the herald of eternity summoned to his final rest, the good Sir Maurice, an event which, as has been already related, made the newly returned knight, lord of the rich manors and castle of St. Donat's ; and which, prohibited altogether, while the customary period of mourning lasted, any outward demonstrations of mirth and rejoicing. But this time was not unemployed, and Edmund Esterling was therein compelled to appear little better than a passive spectator of the wiles and stratagems, by which his deep-plotting brother essayed to rob him of the affections of the lady Cicely ; for however secretly those treacherous intrigues were carried on, they could not escape the lover's watchful eye. Edmund, however, feared not to confide in the constancy and fidelity of his betrothed, and his noble and generous confidence was not misplaced. The cold reception which she invariably gave to his rival's advances ; and her proud and reproachful rejection of all his splendid

proffers of greatness, were what the fiery and now indignant soul of the baron-knight could not tamely brook; and, therefore, seeing that fair means were likely to prove of no avail, he determined to employ coercive measures, and that by power, at least, if not by persuasion, the daughter of William de Londres should become the wife of Sir Robert Esterling.

Such was the state of affairs at St. Donat's castle, when those national events occurred, which have been alluded to in the opening of our narrative. Prince Edward effecting his escape from the custody of his vainly-watchful keepers, raised up anew the fallen standard of royalty, and being immediately joined by the forces of the Duke of Gloucester, and of Roger Mortimer, gallantly took the field. Leicester, who still kept the spiritless Henry his prisoner, surprised by this sudden and unexpected movement, issued his proclamations in the royal name, summoning all the chief lords and barons of the realm, to unite their military vassals and retainers with the army

under his command, with all possible dispatch, in order to quell this new rebellion, as it was somewhat roundly termed, of the king's eldest son, and the Duke of Gloucester.

When tidings of these important events reached the turreted mansions of the Esterlings, they became instantly the scenes of bustle and activity; and the din of preparation rung from one end to the other of his princely domains, when Sir Robert announced his intention of siding with Prince Edward, in his present dubious undertaking. Such announcement was, however, merely made as a blind to the friends and partisans of the royal cause, and nothing was further from the thoughts and intentions of St. Donat's lord, than opposing himself to the measures of the haughty Earl of Leicester, with whom indeed he had already entered into secret treaty, and promised to support, to the utmost of his power, the party of the barons.

* * * *

The sun had already passed the point of noon,

when intelligence was received that the army of Simon Montfort was on its full march towards Gloucestershire, and would next day be within a few miles of St. Donat's castle. This news, which had been quite unexpected, because the uniform celerity of the earl's movements had led all to suppose he would have chosen the shortest route to the point at which he aimed, produced no small confusion. Edmund Esterling strongly urged upon his brother the necessity of his immediately embarking with the forces which he had collected, to join the Duke of Gloucester, while yet it was in his power to do so, and leave to him the defence of the castle. But the wary Robert had formed a different arrangement. He insisted upon taking charge of the castle himself, and called upon his brother to lead forth the succours intended for the prince; but upon the ground of retaining within the walls a sufficient number of troops for their protection, he refused to part with more than fifty of his martial retainers for this purpose. Edmund, however, could not

choose but consent to a plan so near a kin in its probable results, to that of which he had himself been the proposer; and accordingly he prepared for his departure.

On the summit of a rocky mount, at the distance of a good bow-shot seaward of the castle, stood a fine Gothic round tower, the ruins of which even still form a prominent object in the surrounding landscape. From its outward appearance, there was little to recommend it to notice; yet was it in those days of the bow and the battle-axe, well fitted to make a stout resistance. The interior contained several apartments, some of which were tastefully decorated, as if intended for the bowers of repose and peace, rather than the strong-holds of warfare and oppression. Here it was, that, since the death of her father's friend, the generous Maurice, Cicely de Londres had taken up her abode, and, save when especially invited, never entered the castle of his degenerate son.

The bright orb of day had already reached its

western boundary, and the broad expanse of ocean was glowing like a sea of molten gold beneath its parting beams, wave after wave flowed calm and unbroken over the pebbly beach, and creation seemed preparing for her wonted sleep.— But the quiet of inanimate nature was not undisturbed, since along the shore armed men might be seen bustling to and fro, while a gallant shallop was receiving from the hands of busy vassals and retainers, its freight of arms and the furniture of war. On the terraces of the castle, a small band in military array was marshalling itself, and those who composed it might be observed adjusting their warlike trappings and accoutrements, unfurling their pennons, or poising their spears and their battle-axes. From the iron-grated window of her tower, Cicely de Londres pensively watched the movements and evolutions of those below, and brooded over the probable results of the enterprize upon which her lover was about to embark, for she was not ignorant of the cause of all the stir which she saw going on around. Absorbed in

the contemplation of her gloomy anticipations, she heeded not the clatter of his mail, as he ascended the narrow flight of serpentine stairs which conducted to her solitary apartment, and ere she was even aware of his approach, he stood beside her.

“Edmund!” exclaimed the maiden, starting at the same instant from her profound reverie.

“Ay, my sweet lady! Edmund hath stolen from the turmoil of preparation, to look once again on her he loves.—Forgive me, that—I say again, beware my brother’s wiles!”

“Still doubting! have not I sworn it by my father’s fame, that, let Edmund live or die, Cicely de Londres will never be the bride of Robert Easterling!”

“Enough, enough!” added the mail-clad lover, “and if heaven smile but on the righteous cause of England’s prince, the bark which now waits to bear me to his hostile camp, shall ere long bring me back in triumph to the castle of St. Donat’s, and the arms of de Londres’ daughter—Hark!”

The shrill trump of his rival brother, summoned our hero from the soft dalliance of love, and after fondly embracing his beloved, and ratifying upon her lips a warrior's ardent vow, he turned to obey its stirring call, and hastened to rejoin his little band, who were now merely waiting their leader's presence ere they gave their canvass to the breeze, and committed their vessel to its own true element. Guided by "Cynthia's silvery light," our voyagers found themselves ere midnight buffeting the boisterous currents of the Severn, and by sun-rise next morning, the three golden quatrefoils of the house of Esterling, were waving beside the banners of the royal Edward and the Duke of Gloucester!

Scarcely had the gallant ship disappeared in the dim haze of evening, ere the lady Cicely was desired to remove to the castle, at least, until the danger which seemed to threaten all unfortified positions should be over. This invitation, however, she thought proper to decline; but, with the peremptory mandate which almost im-

mediately followed, she was fain to comply, seeing that she was entirely in the power of him by whom it had been issued. And now this important point being gained, Sir Robert Esterling commanded the gates to be closed and barricaded, the walls and towers to be strongly garrisoned ; and thus made a show as of determined resistance. But when the next day brought with it the Earl of Leicester and his royal retinue, the gates were again unbarred and they were admitted into the castle in triumph. The treacherous hypocrisy of the lord of St. Donat's, now became too evident ; and when he publicly ratified the secret treaty which he had before entered into with de Montfort, the last hope of those who, upon the strength of his professions, had joined the honoured standard of his ancestors, was destroyed.

The presence of such illustrious guests as Henry of Winchester, and the Earl of Leicester, could not but be hailed as an high honour by their noble host, who accordingly prepared a magnificent banquet for their entertainment ; at which it was

determined that he should, as a boon, ask in marriage the hand of de Londres' daughter, and with it, of course, the hereditary domains of her ancestors. To this plan he found no difficulty in obtaining the consent and co-operation of the aspiring noble, who had already been informed of the attachment of Cicely to the absent Edmund, whose sudden departure for the camp of the Duke of Gloucester, the wily Robert had taken care to represent as contrary to his express wishes and commands. Simon de Montfort, therefore, was urged by strong motives of self-interest, to prevent, if possible, an avowed opponent from obtaining possession of a lordship, which would at once make him powerful and formidable; and hence he could not choose but second the schemes of one who was a declared adherent and supporter of his own party.

Every thing was skilfully arranged, and when the flow of festivity was at its height, the ambitious baron advanced with his petition, soliciting to have conferred upon him, together with the

hand of his daughter, the titles and possessions of the late lord of Ogmore. The voice of Leicester was raised loud in his behalf, and the imbecile Henry had then no power, even had he had the inclination, to refuse the boon. He commanded, therefore, that as an orphan, and consequently a ward of the crown, Cicely de Londres should early on the morrow bestow her hand upon his right trusty and loyal knight, Sir Robert Esterling. This ungrateful intelligence quickly spread through the castle, and soon reached the ears of her whom it most concerned. She thought upon her sworn promise to Edmund, and forthwith determined on making her escape that very night from the castle of his sires, or if she could not accomplish this, to perish rather than become the bride of his base and crafty brother.

Intoxication, the usual attendant upon banqueting and revelry, had long ere midnight sealed the eye-lids of the garrison of St. Donat's castle, and the watchmen on the battlements slumbered

at their posts, undisturbed by the customary visits of those whose duty it was to see they slept not, but who were now, like themselves, dreaming of wine-cups and Metheglin flagons, instead of lacing the steel-casque on the brow and girding the sword upon the thigh. The vigilance of such keepers, our heroine found it no very difficult task to escape ; and, accompanied by one female attendant, she silently quitted her apartment, and passed unobserved along the dark and gloomy passages which conducted to the chapel, the door of which yielded readily to the pressure of her hand. Not so, however, the outer doors, these were bolted and barred so securely, that all her attempts to force them proved abortive ; and she found that, though the drowsy sentinels had been eluded, she was haply yet far from being at liberty. But the inventive genius of her sex did not forsake her in this extremity.—Espying a small aperture in the wall, above the western window, with the assistance of her trembling maid, she effectually succeeded in enlarging it so

as to allow of their forcing themselves through *. Alighting safely upon a tomb-stone beneath the chapel window, she was enabled without much difficulty, to cross the hollow at present used as an orchard, and by the faint light of the waning moon, to direct her footsteps towards the round tower from which she had so recently been compelled to withdraw. The keeper of this isolated castellet, welcomed the return of his lady-mistress right joyfully. For the kindness of Cicely de Londres could not but gain the hearts of all to whom she was known, and could fidelity alone have made her retreat secure, she might have laughed to scorn the powers of Esterling and Leicester leagued !

The lethean effects of their last night's carousal were beginning to evaporate from the brain of

* A small narrow opening is still pointed out to the curious and inquisitive traveller, as being that through which the intrepid maiden effected her escape ; he may, however, like the writer, feel rather sceptical perhaps upon their identity, unless he can believe the fair daughter of William de Londres to have been a member of the illustrious family of Queen Mab.

the guardians and defenders St. Donat's castle, and therein sense and recollection were rallying anew their scattered energies, when the shrill notes of a distant bugle, breaking the charm of silence, caught the ears of the half-sobered sentinels, and told them

“That great events were on the gale.”

It approached nearer and nearer, and anon the rattling of a courser's hoofs were heard echoing along the paved ascent which led up to the eastern gate, where a brief, but necessary parley took place between the warder and the unexpected and unwelcome messenger, which ended in the latter's being admitted into the inner court, from whence he proceeded immediately to the apartment of Leicester's warlike earl. He was in truth the bearer of important tidings, of tidings which announced the removal of the army of Prince Edward and the Duke of Gloucester from its former position. Upon the receipt of this intelligence, Leicester, with that promptitude and

decision which had throughout characterised his successful career, called instantly to arms his own followers and those of de Esterling, and commanded them to prepare with becoming dispatch for their departure. The unhappy Henry was desired forthwith to leave the pillow of repose, while St. Donat's lord was summoned to attend the nominal deliberations of him whose master genius spoke and it was done !

Such was the rapidity of de Montfort's movements, that ere day break he had, accompanied by his monarch and a king-like retinue of followers, rejoined the main body of his forces, who were now on their full march towards the Severn, upon the banks of which they encamped the self-same night, to the no small chagrin of their new ally; who, instead of having, as he had anticipated, 'a seal put to his splendid schemes of aggrandizement, by his marriage with the late lord of Ogmore's daughter, was fain to follow where Leicester led, and to

gird himself for the perilous chances of the battle field.

Next day being August 4th, 1265, was fought the famous battle of Evesham, which, owing to the fall of their leader, ended, as is well known, in the total overthrow of the forces of the mad parliament ; and, consequently, in the re-erection of the standard of fallen royalty. Death, capture, or disgraceful flight, fell to the lot of all who drew sword in the defence of Leicester's cause. The second became the portion of Sir Robert Esterling, who, having been overtaken in his retreat, was conducted back a prisoner to the camp of the victorious Edward ; not, however, before his brother had left it in order to convey to him the joyful intelligence of the conquest which had been achieved. Perhaps also moved by other and not less powerful motives.

“ Good news gives wings,” said Edmund Esterling, as his light skiff held on her trackless way across the waters of the Bristol channel ; and by the help of a gentle breeze, outstripped the

sluggish waves over which she was impelled right buoyantly along. The sun had disappeared from view, and the haziness of an autumnal eve was gathering fast over the face of earth and sea, marring the brightness of creation's works, and with the dews of night, distilling from on high the balmy opiate of silence and repose! Hark! to the harsh grating of an iron-edged keel ploughing the gravelly beach! An instant more and a mailed warrior's tread is heard, and his stately form glides through the blue mists of twilight! He directs not his steps however to the terraces of the castle, nor yet to the rock-hewn postern, as one standing in need of secrecy—no;—by pathways unseen, though evidently not unknown, he essays to reach the round tower where the fair Cicely de Londres is still a voluntary prisoner. His point is gained, and, in a voice whose sweet modulations would not have disgraced the gay moonlight lovers of Spain and Italy, he carols his artless

SERENADE.

I.

Oh, lady fair ! look forth and see
How sweetly nature slumbers ;
Nor sound is heard,
Save when the bird
Of night pours forth her numbers.—
Look forth, look forth, and see !

II.

Oh, lady fair ! look up and see
How bright the stars are beaming ;
Though twilight still,
Floats round yon hill,
As if the day were dreaming.—
Look up, look up, and see !

III.

And lady fair, look down and see,
Where freed from martial duty,
And battle's toils,
The warrior kneels
At the feet of peerless beauty.—
Look down, look down, and see !

The well-known voice of Edmund Esterling
was soon recognised by his “fayre ladye ;” and
ere he had well finished his lay he found him-

self ascending the stairs which led up to her apartment.

* * * *

Return we to the field of Evesham, where, the conflict over, the heroic Edward was exercising his right of conqueror in disposing of his prisoners

“As it seemed best unto his royal self;”

and with a generosity truly noble, dismissing most of them *sans* rescue and *sans* ransom !

“Sir Robert Esterling,” said the royal victor, as the lord of St. Donat’s was ushered, unarmed and unhelmeted, into his presence; “We had expected better things from one who bore the white cross of England upon his shield; nathless, Sir Knight, we mean not to recriminate. But for the sake of thy brother, who hath borne himself right valiantly in this morning’s fray, we forgive thy treason, and grant thee our permission to depart.—Guards, let your prisoner pass !”

The guards opened a passage between them for the prisoner knight, who, without vouchsafing a word of thanks to his generous victor, bowed sullenly and withdrew. Having possessed himself again of his arms, he remounted his unoffending steed, and plunging his bloody spurs deep into its reeking flanks, bounded off at a rate which few but madmen would have essayed.

Fearful indeed was the conflict of tumultuous passions that warred within his breast, as heedless of every obstacle and obstruction, he scoured along the moon-lit plain. Shame, indignation, and revenge, were too formidable a host to be combated by the still small voice of conscience. Already did his fiend-tortured fancy picture the fair Cicely de Londres struggling at the altar; and he, who seemed fated to thwart all his schemes of ambition, and eclipse the glory of his knightly fame, bleeding beneath the vengeance-nerved arm of a brother. Filled with these dire imaginings, he burst into a shrill demoniac laugh, which, in the stillness of night, sounded as some-

thing more wild and horrid far than mortal voice. 'Twas midnight; his fiery and unjaded courser started back, and snorting loud stood still! The lord of St. Donat's gazed around him, surprised to find that he was—even at his journey's end!

The ancient warder trembled as he heard the stern mandate of his lord, and would fain have disbelieved the evidence of his senses, when the first-born of the good Sir Maurice hurried by, nor deigned a passing word of recognition. 'Twas strange the old man thought, but he had seen stranger things take place since the death of his late master, and so he ceased to wonder! Nothing heeding the dreary and deserted aspect of his father's halls, the knight held on his way; and ere long reached the apartment where he doubted not he should find at least one of his intended victims, and that one the most helpless. But his full-plumed vengeance missed its quarry! De Londres' daughter had departed hence! The silver light of the moon streamed

through the fretted windows, and might have calmed a soul less fiercely agitated ; but upon that of Sir Robert Esterling it produced no such effect. Rage had there obtained the mastery over every gentler feeling, and paused not in its fell career. Loud rung his bugle's blast through the silent and forsaken halls, and called up from their slumbers the few sword-bearing retainers who had escaped the conscriptions of Leicester's earl ; from these he first learnt the escape of de Londres' daughter, and that she had shut herself up in the round tower.

“ There she shall not be long ! ” exclaimed the infuriated knight ; “ hence, thou old drone ! bid the priest hie him to the altar, we shall have work for him anon ! And now, proud maiden, think not to escape Sir Robert Esterling.—Caitiffs ! why stand ye yawning there ? On, on ! ”

With the wild spring of the desert tiger, he bounded forward, and followed by the few retainers who surrounded him, made towards the south postern. Descending along the seaward

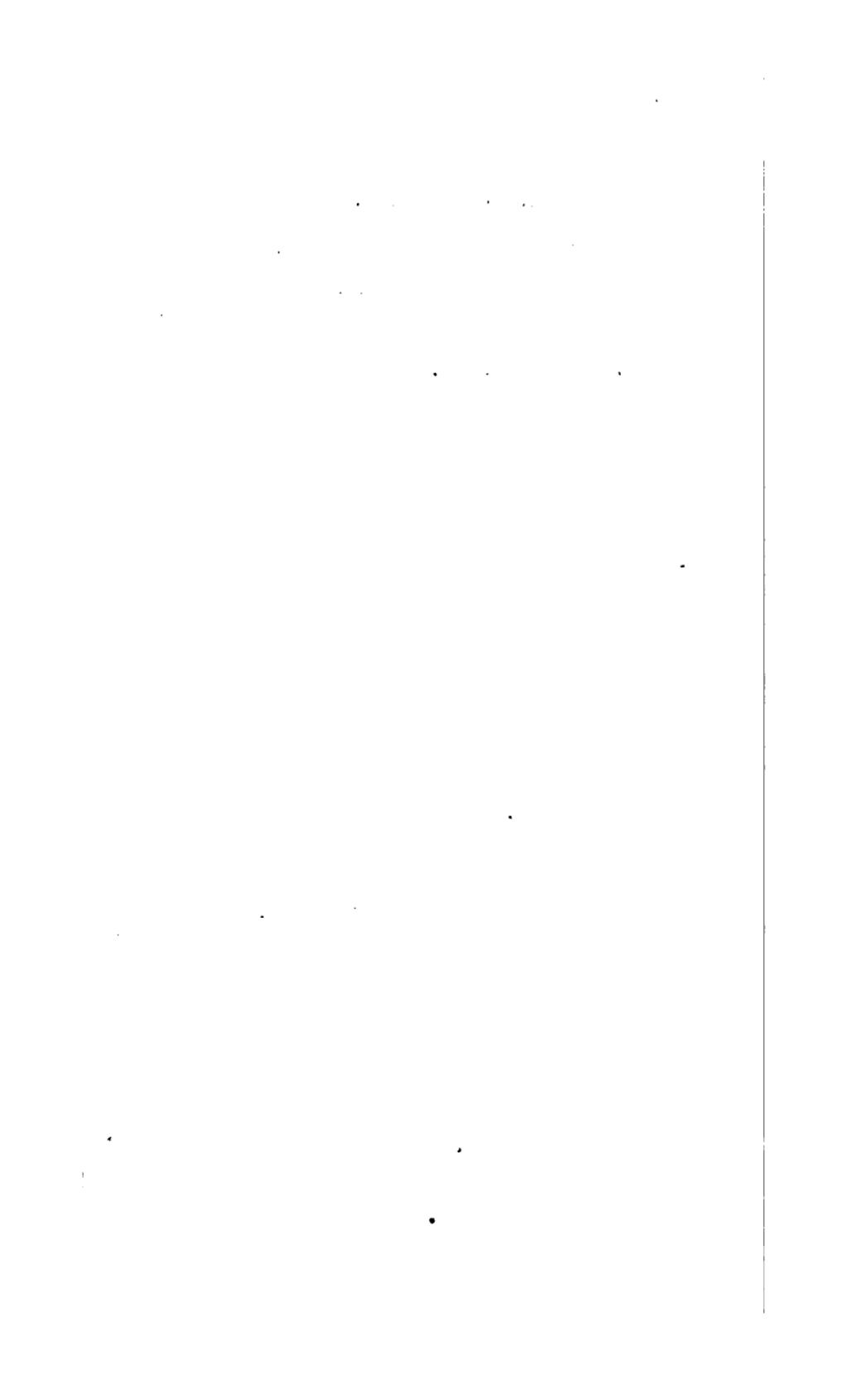
terraces, they soon arrived at the base of the hill upon whose summit was situated the circular tower. The door of which was assaulted with such violence that, ~~magre~~ its stoutness, made it quake upon its massy hinges. The clatter of arms was heard within, and a shouting as of men who were preparing to repel an attack. In a few moments the barrier was forced, and a deadly scuffle ensued—the foremost of the assailants fell with the first blow of some unseen hand. Another and another met a like fate—the place of conflict was too dark to allow of the persons of either party being distinguished.—The din and tumult increased, and a shrill cry was heard above, exclaiming,—“ Beware! Edmund, beware!” whereupon St. Donat’s lord, who appeared to have been held back from the uncourteous affray, by a momentary sense of the respect which was due to his knighthood—dashed into the mellée, and aimed his weapon at the breast of the tall figure of a warrior, who at the foot of the stairs, stood directing the movements

of his friends. His victim fell, and Sir Robert Esterling drew forth the cold brand of death, reeking with the heart's blood of a brother! The unfortunate Edmund gave one loud shriek, sprung forward in the agony of parting life, groaned, and expired!

* * * *

Here closes the story of Edmund Esterling, as recorded in the manuscript referred to in the commencement of my narrative. Of the after life of the Lady Cicely, tradition has preserved two accounts: the first states her to have become the bride of her lover's murderer. The second, that Prince Edward, on being informed of her hapless fate, bestowed her hand upon a young and gallant knight of his own court, as whose wife she lived long and happily; and this last version we feel most inclined to believe, for three reasons: first, because we *wish* it, for the sake of virtue and poetical justice; secondly, because it is well known that the fair lordship of Ogmore never merged into that of St. Donat's; and,

thirdly, because Sir Robert Esterling, not long after his brother's death, married the daughter of a lord of Hainault, who had often fought beside him in the Holy Land.



THE ENCHANTED SHIELD.

THE ENCHANTED SHIELD.

A ROUND-TABLE ADVENTURE.

Upon a great adventure he was bond.

Spenser.

THE festivities of Caerleon were drawing to a close ; but though the sun had set upon the third and last day, the princes and heroes of Christendom, who were there assembled to witness the deeds of the Round-Table Knights, or to dispute with them the prize of the joust and the tourney, neither retired from the banquet, nor laid any embargo upon the wine-cup or the hirlas. The brightly-sparkling yellow mead passed frequently and freely, and the noble and

illustrious revellers grew loquacious from its effects: the bards and minstrels too, felt the influence of their much lauded beverage, as was evident from the wildness of their fancies and the discord of their strings. Nor, indeed, did the great Pendragon's son escape the sweet infection, but paying more regard to his knightly than his regal honours, mingled with his compeers in arms, partaking alike of their nectar and their mirth.

“Geriant!” said the hero of song and romance, addressing himself to the chief bard of the palace, who, with his ancient harp beside him, occupied a raised seat at the lower end of the hall: “why should thy harp strings slumber? Hast thou nor martial song, nor lay of love, for the banquet board to-night?”

“The bards,” replied the minstrel; “await but royal Arthur's bidding.”

“Then be the choice thine own,” added the prince; and therewith the venerable “child of song,” placing his instrument before him, struck

up a wild and warlike symphony, by way of prelude to

THE MELODY OF MONA.

I.

HAIL, great Pendragon's dauntless heir !
And ye whom fate appoints to share
His deathless glory ! While
We wake the theme of by-gone days,
And strike the thrilling harp in praise
Of Mona's Druid isle,
Oh; check your fancy's wild career,—
Dark island ! thou must still be dear
To mountain Wallia's minstrel band,
Though warriors throng thy hallowed strand,
And oft with spear and polish'd brand
Each sacred haunt defile !

II.

When Rome's infuriate legions came,
And gave thy forests to the flame,
And shrine and altar broke ;
Sublime thy Druid-armies rose,
Nor quailed before their island's foes,
Nor bowed beneath their yoke.
But where is now the intrepid host,
The stern defenders of thy coast ?—
Ye powers that first in day's of yore,
Scared each proud eagle from the shore,
How long shall Idda's raven soar,
Heedless of vengeance' stroke ?

III.

How long must Mona's island feel
The dread effects of fire and steel ?
How long with aching eyes,
Behold her groves of lofty oak
Fall 'neath the 'invaders' ruthless stroke,
Or blazing to the skies ;
And vainly shout aloud for aid
To save the Druid's holy shade ?
Heroes ! who crowd the festive board,
Why sleeps the retributive sword ?
Why hath not Mona's mountains heard
Your piercing battle-cries ?

IV.

Knights of King Arthur's table round,
For feats of valour far renown'd
And deeds of high acclaim !
Shall Mona call in vain ?—Arouse,
And snatch from her invaders' brows
The blood-stained wreath of fame !
And while secure their prize they deem,
Plunge them in Menai's roaring stream !—
Or will you view (no longer brave),
Their rude barbaric banners wave
Triumphant o'er the Druids' grave,
And perish Mona's fame !

Exhausted by the effort which he had made,
to awaken in the breasts of his noble hearers a

sense of the duty which they owed to their country, the aged bard, resigning his instrument into the hands of an attendant, sunk back into his seat, and leant his head against one of the pillars between which he sat; while the hall of banqueting rang with the applause of its illustrious guests, and the threatenings of instant vengeance upon the enemies of Mona's isle.

"We will to Mona, by the sacred cross!" exclaimed King Arthur; "what say our British knights?"

"Vengeance for Mona's isle!" was the brief, but unanimous reply of the latter; and at the same moment each laid his hand upon the cold hilt of his trusty falchion, lifting it upon high in a manner that declared it was the intention of all present, to ratify their hastily formed resolution by the oath of knighthood, which like the laws of the Medes and Persians might not be altered. At this juncture, however, Dubricius, archbishop of Caerleon, held aloft his ivory

crosier, and in an instant the weapons of warfare bowed down before it.

“ Form no rash vows,” shouted out the wearer of the mitre; “ it ill becomes the Knights of the Round Table to resolve upon war at the banquet board; or to heed the vain babblings of an unrighteous bard. Moreover, there is one in waiting even now, who hath a boon to ask, which tendeth to the honour of every true knight, and the good of the holy church.—Lleudad, advance !”

Hereupon, a cowled monk, who had remained unnoticed among the crowd at the lower end of the hall, forced his way through, and approaching the throne of the Silurian prince, there assumed a posture of lowly obeisance, having first stooped down to kiss the hem of the archbishop’s flowing robe. The primate and his less fortunate colleague, like skilful observers of times and opportunities, had selected the most favourable moment for bringing forward their suit, well knowing that it booted little to the half-intoxicated knights, whether the effer-

vescence of their feelings vented itself in the defence, or in the destruction of the remains of Druidism ; and the song of the bard having worked up their passions to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, it now only remained to take advantage of this circumstance, by turning the spring-tide of those passions into another channel. Still holding up on high the sacred symbol of his profession, Dubricius commanded silence throughout the hall, and having, though not without some difficulty, succeeded in obtaining it, he made a signal for the monk to proceed with the errand which had brought him thither. The latter obeying, addressed himself to the monarch, and in a slow and solemn tone of voice, delivered the following apparently studied speech.

“ Great and illustrious prince, whose glory hath eclipsed the glory of all other princes and potentates of the earth ; the honour of the holy church, and of our most blessed and exalted lady, whose ceaseless prayers and intercessions have obtained for thy arms, conquest and victory over

the enemies of this land, now call for the assistance of thy sword, commanding thee to purge thy realm therewith from the abominations of idolatry, ere thou pledgest it to any other undertaking whatsoever.—Know then, most great and glorious prince, and ye too brave and valiant Knights of the Round Table, that there is not far from hence a small island, inhabited by cruel and merciless pagans and magicians, who regard neither the name of the all virtuous Mary, nor the most holy brotherhood of her own abbey, but persist in worshipping mis-shapen idols of oak, and by their foul and devilish enchantments, work great mischief to the church and danger to the state. Bardsey, in former times, was the name this island bore; but of late it hath been called the island of the Current, by reason that by the magic arts of those who dwell therein, it hath been rendered hard of access, by a furious and terrific current which runneth all round it, making it dangerous to attempt to reach that isle, nay, almost certain

death ; for, as we have often heard, if ever knight or damsel should chance to escape the waves, they be forthwith sacrificed on the altars of some pagan deity. The immediate conquest of this place, great prince, is the boon now craved at thy hands, for the honour and safety of the holy church, who desires that, when cleansed from the filthy abominations of its false gods, it may be given up entirely to herself."

"Holy father," replied King Arthur; "knowest thou not that we in former times essayed the conquest of this island, but were always defeated by reason of the spirits of air and water, which its wizards and enchanters conjured up against us, and against whom no knight, even of the Round Table, was able to stand, save only Sir Tristan and Sir Galath, whose wisdom and virtue laugh to scorn the spells and the power of enchanters. And knowest thou not, likewise, that we lost at that same time our fair and beauteous daughter Anna, who, having been affianced to the immaculate son of Sir

Lancelot, was hastening to join him ; but alas ! was shipwrecked and lost in that same furious current thou hast spoken of ; and though Sir Galath sought to revenge her death, he failed of success ; and we were fain to return back again with great loss, both of men and reputation, and of our royal navy to boot. Wherefore, then, holy father, seekest thou to bring us to undertake this adventure anew, seeing that it is so hopeless and so perilous ?"

These truly formidable objections satisfied the monk at once, that he must hold out some other and more advantageous, or more romantic inducement than the good of the church, ere the half-Christianized knights of Caerleon, would feel much inclined to embark in so doubtful and so dangerous a quest ; and, accordingly, he soon brought to the support of his cause more congenial reasons than those just adduced.

" Fear not,—the holy church is able to give the victory to all those who adventure themselves in her behalf. Notwithstanding, if Arthur fears

for the blood of his subjects, and the weal of the state, she will consent to waive for a time the claim which she hath upon the forces and armies of Britain, requiring instead thereof, but twelve gallant knights, whose prowess and whose valour she promises to crown with success: nay more, he who shall prove himself most valiant and most faithful in her cause, shall receive as his reward the renowned Pridwen, the shield of the radiant aspect, which is able to withstand the arms of earth and hell, and which shall ensure victory to whosoever displayeth it in the field of battle. The wizards and enchanters of the island of the Current, well knowing the virtue of Pridwen, and that he who should ever gain possession of it, would surely overcome them, and destroy their power and dominion over the elements; have concealed it in a deep and gloomy cavern, upon the entrance of which the far-famed Merlin hath placed his magic seals, and these may only be broken by the prophet himself, or by him whom the books of doom have appointed."

The wary Lleudad had now struck a chord to which every knightly bosom vibrated ; and, while he was yet extolling the innumerable virtues of the Enchanted Shield, the prince stopped all further eulogium, by an abrupt

“Enough, enough ! thy boon is granted, holy father ; we have heard of the fame of Pridwen, and many years ago made a solemn vow, that whenever we should discover the place of its concealment, we would attempt to bear it hence ; and, therefore, good abbot, we return thee thanks for giving us this opportunity of fulfilling our heaven-registered resolve.”

“The sword of Sir Lancelot, too,” said he of the lake, “hath of old been pledged to this quest, and longs for the hour when it may be redeemed.”

“Vengeance,” said the immaculate knight, “shall be the battle-shout of Sir Galath, and if he may but avenge the soul death of his bright-eyed Anna, little will he care who wins the enchanted Pridwen.”

“The church would not separate father from son,” said Dubricius, “and therefore makes choice of ye both.”

The Round Table heroes now all eagerly pressed forward, to solicit the honour of being permitted to join in an enterprise, in which they beheld their prince and the famous Sir Lancelot about to embark; but the abbot of St. Mary’s refused to admit more than the number he had at first stipulated for; and contented himself with selecting from among the crowd of candidates, those most celebrated for deeds of high emprise, among whom were, the matchless enchanter and hero, Sir Tristan; the battle-knight Sir Owen, Urien, Prince of Reged’s son, and the long-tried companion of Sir Lancelot du Lac; the golden-tongued Gwalchmai; and the brave and faithful counsellor of Arthur, Sir Aaron le Sage.

“And now, holy Lleudad,” said the archbishop, if thy choice hath been made, it is meet ye depart to your brethren, and with them, before the sanctified altar of St. Mary’s, humbly implore

the blessing of heaven on the valiant heroes who have pledged themselves to this most just and noble enterprise.—And to you, inheritor of great Pendragon's fame, is assigned three days to dismiss from the court of Caerleon, its royal and illustrious guests, and to prepare for the adventure which, before this sacred symbol, ye must now swear faithfully to perform."

The archbishop again lifted up his crosier, and the twelve knights who had been chosen by the abbot, kneeling before, it, swore, by the most holy cross, by the virtues of the virgin-mother, and by the bones of all the martyred saints! to expel from the island of the Current, the wizards, druids, and enchanters, who abode therein ; to demolish the altars and shrines of Pagan idolatry ; and having so done, to resign the island itself for ever, to the brotherhood of St. Mary's monastery.

This ceremony being gone through, the good father-abbot departed from the royal presence, and the rest of those present followed his example:

the noble strangers to talk over the singular events which they had just witnessed, and the fortunate knights to dream of the adventure of the enchanted shield; the bard alone remained behind in his seat, and when the wayward multitude had hied them hence, he was heard addressing himself to his mountain-lyre, in the following wild and melancholy strain:—

Spirit of harmonious numbers !
Passion's monarch, yet its slave,
Wherefore from inglorious slumbers
Did'st thou seek to rouse the brave ?
Worse than madness was the endeavour
Valour's spirit to awake :
Soon thy power must end for ever—
Soon thy master's heart shall break !

Early next day, King Arthur proceeded to dismiss the princes and nobles, who had assembled at the court of Caerleon, from the most distant regions of the globe, to honour with their presence his long-anticipated festival, and to share in its royal and magnificent sports;—and this duty he performed in a manner becoming the high dignity

which he held among the mighty ones of the earth. To one, was presented a massy shield, beautifully resplendent with tasteful devices of inlaid gold and silver work ; to another, a helmet elaborately carved in polished steel or brass ; to a third, a breast-plate, so richly and exquisitely burnished, as that all the bright colours of the rainbow might be seen therein ; while a fourth, mayhap, received at his munificent hands, a falchion of unrivalled strength and excellence, the hilt of which was heavy with gems and precious stones ; or, it may be, was honoured with the golden torques ; and, in short, of all his proud guests, not one departed from the court without bearing with him some valuable token of the respect or liberality of its royal master. Queen Gueniver, likewise, on her part, took care to bestow upon each and all of the beauteous dames and damoiselles, some costly and appropriate mark of her regard. And by such truly unexampled generosity it was, that the fame and praise of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table,

became noised abroad and recorded in the four quarters of the globe. These proceedings occupied the whole of two days, and a part also of the third, the day allowed them to prepare for the adventure to which they had recently bound themselves; but as every true knight was obliged by the laws and institutes of chivalry, to stand always in readiness to act upon the most instantaneous summons, but a short time was sufficient for every necessary preparation, and the chosen twelve accordingly retired early to rest, in order that they might rise with the lark, and begin their journey with the sun..

The officers of the palace were at their appointed posts, and the knights had taken their several stations at the well-garnished board, and merely awaited the appearance of their prince that they might commence the important labour of breaking their fast—for knights though they were, aye, and right hardy ones too, they deemed a full stomach much better than an empty one, when they had any important enterprise to achieve.

At length the mighty monarch came into the hall but a thoughtful uneasiness was imprinted upon his countenance, and he performed his knightly salutations with less ease and courtesy than was his wont.

“ The brave conqueror of Cerdic looks disturbed this morning, may his faithful knights demand the cause thereof ? ” inquired Sir Lancelot du lac.

“ A true knight,” replied the king, “ hath no secret from his companions in adventure. In brief then, Sir Lancelot, 'tis the dreams of last night have troubled and disturbed me. Sir Tristan, thou canst resolve into realities the wild phantoms of sleep, and unveil the dark things of futurity ; be it thine therefore to declare the meaning of my vision.—Know then, that I beheld a noble eagle perched upon the topmost branch of a wide-spreading oak, and around it were gathered many others nearly its equal in size and beauty. An innumerable swarm of hawks, and ravens rising from the sea, made straight towards the royal bird, and so greatly annoyed it and its

fellows, that the eagles were fain to seek safety in flight. Mounting upwards, I saw them attain the summit of a lofty mountain, upon the mist-clad brow of which, a large carbuncle shone with a sun-like splendour; while the audacious hawks hovered in the air below. Then the proud bird taking that wondrous gem into its beak, returned towards the earth, and such was the bright fulgence of its prize, that there was not found one among the thousands of its winged assailants able to endure the intenseness of the glare, muchless to gaze thereon; but alas! just as the victor was about to alight upon the branch from whence it had at first been driven, I beheld those of its own race and kindred fall on it unawares, and after a desperate struggle, overpower it by their numbers, till it fell. And so it was, that while these ingrate birds were quarrelling for the dreadful gem, which their leader, in defending himself against their assaults, had dropped, the hawks and the ravens again taking courage, returned and succeeded in beating them away from the

prize, which they immediately covered from sight, and then perched themselves securely upon the branches of the royal oak. Such was the dream, gallant knights, which hath troubled me, and now, let Sir Tristan declare to us its meaning and its import."

The hero appealed to, continued silent for some time, as if to collect his powers of penetration together, to the end that he might satisfy the demand of his prince; but was ultimately obliged to acknowledge he was unable to tell him the right interpretation, and begged to refer the matter over to the consideration of the reverend Dubricius, who, in his turn, referred it to "some priest of Pagan duties," deeming it, possibly, beneath the dignity of an archbishop, to trouble himself with the vague fancies of a sleeping brain. King Arthur now appealed to the chief bard of his palace, who, however much neglected upon the half-Christian festival of chivalry, was still looked up to as one who

"Was not of the herd of common men."

“Geriant,” said he, “can thy bardic-lore explain to thee, the meaning of the dream which thou hast heard?”

“Forgive me,” replied the minstrel, “but wherefore should Pendragon’s son expect the bard to declare that which cannot be declared either by the learned Tristan, or the reverend Dubricius?—Great prince, my bardic-lore may fire the soul with song, but to the prophet’s heaven-born wisdom lays no claim. But Arthur may perchance find out the interpretation of the vision which he saw, by attending to

THE

DREAM OF A BARD.

One night, while I slept in,
Great Idris’s chair,
My senses all steep’d in
Forgetfulness ;—(ne’er
To pilgrim when weary,
Or captive fast bound,
Came slumber more dreary,
Or sleep more profound):

My soul for brief season
Winged upward its way,
Released from its prison
Of sensitive clay ;
And free as a spirit
That ne'er was controul'd,
Nor doom'd to inherit
Mortality's mould ;
Beheld the full glory
Of Destiny's morn,
And read the dark story
Of ages unborn.
And once as it wander'd
Sublime through the gloom
Of the future, and ponder'd
The lessons of doom ;
Suspending all motion,
It saw whence it rode,
On the breast of the ocean,
The shrine of a god.
A priest stood before it,
Enrobed in pure white,
Though round it and o'er it
Hung darkness and night ;—
His hand seem'd to falter
While grasping the knife,
Which had on that altar
Shed innocent life.—
Nor guilt, nor compunction,
The cause of that thrill ;
He heeded no unction
His conscience to still—

But a dread foreboding
He might not withstand,
That danger was brooding,
And death was at hand !

A diademed warrior
Advanced o'er the brine,
And broke through each barrier
That guarded the shrine ;—
And onward still pressing
Regardless of shame,
Of curse, or of blessing,
Reproach, or acclaim ;—
His falchion bright beaming
He drew from its sheath,
Of havoc still dreaming—
Of warfare and death.—
And deaf to all pleading,
In desperate mood,
He stained it unheeding
With sanctified blood !
Its victim just started,
Then bowed to the stroke,
Yet ere life departed
Thus, thus he bespoke :—
“ Proud victor, whose story,
Not time shall efface,
The sun of thy glory
Is setting apace ;—
‘Tis all unavailing,
The dye hath been cast,

And hark to yon wailing
That comes on the blast ;—
Not vain have I callen
On Annwn's* fell band,
A monarch hath fallen,
And woe to the land !”

Time passed on his journey:
Again I beheld,
Not decked for the tourney,
But girt for the field ;—
The diadem'd warrior
Who came o'er the brine,
And broke thro' each barrier
That guarded the shrine.—
Around him were thronging
The mighty in arms,
All anxiously longing
For battle's alarms ;
And proud waved his banner,
Tho' light as the down,
The loadstar of honour,
And fame and renown—
His dragon-crown'd helmet
Gleamed bright on the view,
As nougat might o'erwhelm it,
Or tarnish its hue ;—
His shield was all lightness,
Tho' radiant with gems,
Surpassing in brightness
The summer sun's beams ;

* Annwn—The Hell of Druid mythology.

O'er pennons, and lances,
And helmets, and spears,
The diamond-flash glances,
The carbuncle glares ;
And never till then did
So gallant a knight,
With buckler so splendid
Come forth to the fight ;—
And chiefs without number,
And heroes were there,
As roused from the slumber
And sleep of despair ;—
The battle-cry sounded,
The war-challenge pealed,
And onward they bounded
Sublime o'er the field !
But while they were closing,
Those ranks of renown,
Opposed and opposing,
O'erthrowing, o'erthrown,
I saw the bold warrior
Who came o'er the brine,
And broke thro' each barrier
That guarded the shrine,—
Despite the protection
His shield could afford,
Fall, slain by defection
And treachery's sword !
And wild shrieks of horror
Came borne on the wind,
And shoutings of terror
And triumph combined ;

And those who gave token
That all should applaud,
Were routed and broken,
And scattered abroad.
And none stopp'd to cherish
The fallen in fight,
But left him to perish—
That dragon-crowned knight.
Too much he confid'd
In those who were near,
Unsuccoured, unaided,
I saw him expire,
No more to inherit
The trophies of fame,
For loudly a spirit
Was heard to proclaim—
“ Not vain have I callen
On Annwn's fell band,
A monarch hath fallen,
And woe to the land !”

The vibrations of the bard's prophetic lyre had died away into their softest tone, ere the silence of the hall was broken by the sounds of human voice. King Arthur sat absorbed in gloomy thoughts ;—the predictions of the bardic choir had often been so fully and fearfully realised, that he could not choose but ponder upon the dark and

mysterious strains which he had just heard. His brave and loyal knights, too, appeared equally struck therewith, and observed as strict a silence. Even the Christian archbishop could not for some time break through the spell, which the harp's wild numbers had thrown around him; but recollecting himself, that it ill became the sacredness of his character, to be influenced by the music of one, whom he looked upon as little better than a Pagan, he snatched up the ivory cross, which had inadvertently fallen from his hand, and addressing himself to the Silurian prince and his gallant compeers, exclaimed,

“Can it be, that Arthur, the favoured of heaven, and the illustrious Knights of the Round Table, have forgotten the oath which, three days ago, before this consecrated cross, they swore, that they thus tarry listening to a minstrel's vagaries, when the cause of the holy church and their own glory alike urge them on to its immediate fulfilment?”

To this abrupt and vehement interrogative of the prelate, the golden-tongued Gwalchmai replied:

“Reverend father, the vow which we have made, binds us, it is true, to the adventure—but there is a time for battle, and a time for rest; and it would, methinks, as ill become the warriors of the Honied isle, to fly from the song of the bard, as to disregard the summons of the church. Without the lay of the former, to hallow his name, and to hand it down in song to the future generations of the earth, where would be the hero’s boasted fame? And what motive, save this, doth Dubri-cius suppose, could have induced the Knights of the Round Table to pledge themselves to the conquest of Bardsey?—Surely, not the hope of obtaining an enchanted shield?”

“No!” shouted out the young and fiery Sir Galath, whose frozen feelings now began to flow again, “but vengeance upon those whose dire enchantments and hell-begotten spells, snatched away the plighted bride of Sir Galath, and mayhap slaughtered the pride of Arthur’s court upon the foul altar-stone of savage deities!”

This vehement ejaculation of the disappointed

lover, aroused the half-dormant spirit of knight-hood again into activity. Sir Lancelot du lac was the first to follow the example of his son ; and, quitting his seat at the breakfast board, held aloft his lance in an attitude of proud defiance. The other knights, in imitation of him, hurried to possess themselves of their respective arms : and Arthur, as if by the noise they made, awoke from a deep trance, started up, and with a wild and furious air, poising his favourite Rhôn, exclaimed,—" To Bardsey, come what will ! "

In the bustle and vociferous uproar which now ensued, the poor child of song was again forgotten ; and, with a few of his musical disciples, was left alone in the hall, while the whole of the knights, with their gay-clad attendants, moved on *en masse* towards the outer court of the palace ; where the grooms and esquires were in waiting with the steeds of their noble masters, ready harnessed for the chivalrous expedition they were about to undertake. In a few minutes, the mailed and armoured riders were seated in their

saddles, and, the archbishop having pronounced his benediction upon them, King Arthur sounded his golden-tipped horn, at which the splendid cavalcade bounded off in right gallant style, and with an appearance as formidable as dazzling; for, though only twelve knights had originally been selected for the expedition by the good father abbot of St. Mary's monastery, no objection whatever was made to those who chose voluntarily to join their battle companions, when the latter took their departure from the royal palace of Caerleon, in quest of the perilous and unknown adventures of the enchanted shores of the Island of the Current!

Sir Lancelot and Sir Owen, as the two battle knights of King Arthur's court, led the van of the martial company; while the British monarch himself, with the rest of the chosen corps, trod close upon their heels. Their fiery steeds possessed too much mettle, to require that any time should be lost in unnecessary haltings; and they galloped and cantered, and cantered and gallop-

ed, without exhibiting the least symptom of being jaded or fatigued, from the rising of the glorious orb of day, until the lilac-tinted clouds of the western horizon were changed into alloyless gold !

The dun shadows of evening were, however, gathering fast, when the brave Knights of the Round Table arrived at St. Mary's monastery, where they were received by the abbot, and his holy brethren, with every mark of honour and respect, befitting their high rank. The impatience of the heroes of the lance and sword was too great to allow of their wasting much of their valuable time with those of the cowl and cassock ; and having turned their steeds into the pasture belonging to the convent, they hastened down to the beach, determined to embark forthwith for the Island of the Current, and to essay immediately their wild and dangerous undertaking. The reverend Lleudad accompanying them in the capacity of guide, and in order to ensure by his holy presence, the favour and protection of heaven.

“ How is this, father abbot ? ” said the Knight

of the Lake: “Didst thou not tell us we should have to cross a stream, deeper and wilder than the Menai, in a tempest? and lo thou seest 'tis smoother than a sea of oil.”

“True, sir knight; but I would have ye beware of its oily surface; it betokens no good, believe me: for, doubtless, some powerful spell is at work, and thereby restrains its accustomed fury.”

“Then let us across,” said Sir Tristan, “ere the spell is dissolved, and the waves are freed from their bondage!”

At the self-same moment, however, a loud peal of thunder rolled awfully above their heads, echoing again and again among the lofty hills and rocky prominences around them; while the slumbering sea sunk like a giant’s bosom when he breathes, and in a moment rushed through the narrow strait with a velocity and force, which more than confirmed the statement of the holy abbot. King Arthur gazed up to the dark and gathering clouds, with a look of scorn and proud defiance. Sir Tristan and Sir Galath started back from the

margin of the flood, which swept away in its rushing course the boat which, in their impatience to seize Time by the forelock, they had unwisely loosened from its moorings. Sir Lancelot du lac and his battle companion, buried the bright points of their lances in the sand ; and stood firm and unmove^d as the mountains of Eryri. Nor did the other adventurers betray any signs of fear at the awful and unexpected tumult of the unchained elements ; though, as this continued to increase, without any prospect of abatement, they were fain to follow the advice and example of the good father abbot : who, believing that the better part of valour was discretion, had prudently sheltered himself from the peltings of the storm, behind the walls of his own monastery, leaving the bold champions of Caerleon to act as they deemed most consistent with the strict notions of knightly honour. As, however, the prospect of reaching the opposite shores that night had become utterly hopeless, it was resolved to defer the attempt until the morrow ; at which time, it was hoped, the

winds and waters might possibly wear a more favourable aspect.

The holy brotherhood of St. Mary's received the knights joyfully, and entertained them to their hearts desire; while they took upon themselves the important task of praying throughout the live-long night, for the success of the next morning's undertaking. In this service they were occasionally assisted by the more devout of their noble and illustrious guests; among whom was the immaculate Sir Galath, who came there to offer up a prayer for the repose of the soul of his much-beloved Anna.

The following morning, as soon as the fair countenance of the sun shewed itself in the dappled east, our heroes—having first paid their respects to the well and daintily supplied refectory of the monastery—donned their armour of proof, and proceeded again to the beach; but on looking about for the Island of the Current, they found so dense and impenetrable a mist to cover the whole surface of the intervening strait, that it was

next to impossible for them to discern any object at the distance of a full lance's length off.

“Good father!” said Arthur, addressing himself to their guide, “the prize we came hither in quest of, appears to have melted into air. Or knowest thou the way which leads to this dread isle of the ocean, through the shadows and clouds with which it seems to be surrounded?”

“Great prince!” replied the abbot, “did I not tell ye that the adventure would prove fearful and perilous? But be not dismayed; though dangerous, it shall be accomplished: and, under the protection of the sacred cross, let us on; nor fear what mischief all the legions of hell can work against us!”

So saying, he held aloft the symbol which was to carry with it more terror and confusion in its march than ever did the eagles of imperial Rome; and leading the way down to the verge of the shrouded flood, was followed, or preceded, by the adventuring host.

Sir Galath, whose virtues made him proof

against demon charm and wizard spell, was first to gain the foremost skiff; and Sir Tristan, who was fain in the holy presence of their guide to refrain from exercising his own forbidden art, and of defeating the effects of one enchantment by another, was close at his side as he entered; nor was the monarch with his battle knights far behind. Sir Aaron le Sage, and the eloquent Gwalchmai, with the remainder of the chosen heroes, seated themselves in another boat, intending to follow the abbot's well known standard, which, from its reflecting the light through the gloom that made all things alike undistinguishable, was meant to be their guiding-star across the flood. Three other vessels, filled with volunteers in the cause of the church, strove also to keep the same object in view, but in vain; and they not only lost sight of the cross, but were soon parted from each other, notwithstanding their most strenuous endeavours to keep together. Still, however, they rowed perseveringly forward, not doubting but that they should soon reach

the island, despite the dense fogs and mists which concealed it from their sight, and be in time to share in the glory of its conquest, and the honour of obtaining the enchanted shield.

Under the guidance and protection of the abbot of St. Mary's, the bark which contained the prince and his companions, gained the clouded shore in safety, and discharged its martial freight in good condition, and uninjured or in mind or body by any real or imaginary obstacles with which they had hitherto had to contend. Finding himself upon firm ground again, Sir Lancelot du lac applied the smoothly-polished tip of his hirlas to his well-practised lips, and blew a blast as loud, at least, if not louder than that which pealed from the famed Rolando's horn, when that gallant knight was attacked by the treacherous Moors in the valley of Roncesvalles. Unfortunately the atmosphere which now surrounded our heroes, was so dull and heavy as to be incapable of conveying to the scattered adventurers the summons of their leader: one only of the four

remaining boats answered to the signal ; this, however, proved to be the one whose presence was deemed most necessary to the success of the expedition, and King Arthur immediately recognised in the faint echo which was returned to Sir Lancelot's call, the mellow notes of his loyal and trusty knight, the golden-tongued Gwalchmai. After exchanging signals for a considerable length of time, an union was at last effected between those champions who had, by the ministers of the church, been set apart for the holy enterprise.

Like efforts were now made to collect the remainder of the warriors of Caerleon, but not with like success ; and after much useless waste of breath, our heroes, by and with the advice of their reverend guide, ceased their instrumental clamour, and turned both mind and body to proceed with their dangerous quest. Hardly able to distinguish one another in the gloom which surrounded them, they however proceeded onward, through a thick and entangled forest of gigantic oaks

and briery underwoods, among which bats, and owls, and birds unclean, flitted in countless multitudes, and, disturbed by the unexpected intrusion of human feet, issued from their dark and dreary hiding places ; and flapping their foul and loathsome wings against the towering helmets of their intruders, caused them to start back with fear at every step they took ; while their low and hollow ~~wailings~~^{cries}—for even the screech owl's shrill and piercing cry was in the air they breathed scarce heard—made the stoutest heart confess a dread of things and powers invisible, and quail with apprehensions, entirely unknown, because till then unfelt, by the bold and dauntless princes of Pendragon's court. And ever and anon, more hideous and more terrible opponents stood before them ; and grim and ghastly spectre-like figures met them at every gap and opening which they came to, and frowning defiance on them, essayed to scare them back by the hideousness of their aspects ; but the immaculate virtue of Sir Galath, and the spell-

defying powers of Sir Tristan, seconded as these amulets were by the good swords of their possessors, overcame all opposition, and the phantoms and shadowy forms which hovered in the air, or stalked in frightful majesty along the earth, fled from *their* approach much more readily than they did from the consecrated standard of St. Mary's monk !

“ Holy father,” said the royal knight ; “ hath this dark and hellish wood neither outlet nor termination ; or must we wander here till the sun goes down, if indeed it hath not set already ?”

“ Be not impatient, my liege,” replied the abbot ; “ the island scarce measures a league in circumference, and were it overgrown with oaks and brambles from bank to bank, we must ere long gain one extremity. Fear not, then, for though the whole armies of hell were marshalled against us, the cause of the church must triumph, and its supporters receive their promised reward.”

“ Silence, thou prating monk !” exclaimed the rough voice of Sir Lancelot du lac ; “ hear ye

not the sounds of melody ? Hark ! Hark !”—

The knights stood still at the bidding of their brave compeer, and attentively listening, they were enabled to distinguish the low murmuring of a harp, which appeared to be approaching nearer and nearer to the spot where they stood : until, as by a miracle, its wild notes became perfectly clear, distinct and sonorous, though at the same time, their own voices could with difficulty be heard at the distance of a dozen paces ; and anon the invisible minstrel chanted in a tone half-threatening, half-admonishing, the following prophetic strain :

“ Rush not madly on your doom,
Princes of the ensanguined plume !
Bardsey’s isle shall ne’er reward
Those who draw the battle-sword !—
Why defile its hallowed ground,
Heroes of the Table Round ?—
Deem not you shall laurels gain
On the bosom of the main ;
And tho’ yours the dangerous toil,
Other hands shall reap the spoil.
Others claim it for their own—
Yours—the Druid’s curse alone !”

“ It is the voice of Geriant !” exclaimed the prince. “ But I fear me, noble bard, thy warning comes too late. But holy father, see you not a trembling light in yonder distance ?”

“ ‘Tis the curst light of foul idolatry,” replied the abbot; “ and well may it tremble, when the holy cross draws near it; but ‘tis not enough—yonder flame must be extinguished in blood, ere the bright beams of heaven will deign to shine upon this loathsome spot. Onward then, brave knights, and quench it in the heart’s blood of those who administer there the rites of hellish adoration !”

Spirited by this furious address, the bold warriors of Caerleon rushed forward with all the speed that the nature of the ground would admit of; but as they drew nearer to the Druid’s roofless temple, they intentionally slackened their pace, that they might the better observe those who worshipped there, all of whom appeared to occupy some honourable rank in the ancient institution of Bardism, as their long flowing robes of white, or blue, or green, sufficiently

indicated. Before the elevated altar-stone, upon which a clear flame burnt brightly and steadily, the chief Druid stood, enrobed in spotless white ; his right hand grasping the sacrificial knife, while his left pointed upward to the skies, as if imploring for earth the blessings of heaven : around him, his companions were ranged according to their respective ranks of Druid, Bard, and Ovate, and each apparently engaged in fervent devotion. As touched by the sacredness of the scene before them, the Round Table Knights paused in their career, and seemed to doubt the justness of the adventure in which they were engaged ; and Arthur, as he gazed upon the stately form of him who stood before the altar, could not choose but ponder upon the " Dream of the Bard." But the wary Lleudad, fearful of the consequences of delay and of reflection, called aloud upon them to advance to the overthrow of Paganism, and to let none of its supporters escape the general slaughter, since the interests of the holy church required it.

Sir Galath, who had revenge to spur him on, was the first to comply with the commands of the abbot, and hurling his ashen spear towards the sacred band, stretched a green-robed Ovate at the feet of his brethren, who, as they saw him fall, raised a loud shriek of terror and surprise, and turned to behold whence came the fatal shaft; but ere they could well do so, the other knights fell upon them, and heedless of their cries for mercy, spared not one! The Arch-Druid met the lance of the British prince unmoved, but when he felt its barbed point, he leapt in the agony of parting life upon the altar before which he had been ministering, and as his heart's best blood streamed down its sides, he raised his faltering voice, and cursing the author of his own and his brethren's death, expired in repeating a strain familiar to the ear of his royal murderer:

Proud victor, whose story,
Not time shall efface,
The sun of thy glory
Is setting apace ;—

'Tis all unavailing,
The dye hath been cast—
And hark ! to yon wailing
That comes on the blast !
Not vain have I callen
On Annwn's fell band,
A monarch hath fallen,
And woe to the land !

“ Ah ! again 'tis Geriant's voice,” exclaimed the prince ; “ can it be that I have slain the bard ?” and so saying, he sprung forward towards the altar, to examine the person of his fallen victim ; but a loud rumbling noise from above and beneath him arrested his steps, and he paused but to behold it fall to the earth, and bury beneath its ruins the lifeless body of the Druid-priest. And now, while the swords and lances of his knights, in obedience to the vociferous mandates of their guide, slaughtered their defenceless adversaries, King Arthur, awe struck and astonished at what he had already seen and heard, looked calmly on, as if unconscious of the work of death in which they were engaged.

When the altar had been overthrown, and its flames extinguished, the atmosphere, instead of brightening, as the holy abbot had predicted, became darker and darker, while a noise, like that of distant thunder, was heard to arise, as the tumult of the assault died away. The prince blew his horn both loud and shrill, and Sir Lancelot, Sir Galath, and Sir Tristan, being within hearing of its notes, shouted in answer thereto, and ere long came up with their monarch. “Where is the monk?” was the first question demanded of them.

“Where danger is not,” replied the knight of the lake; “if such a place may be found in this island. Heaven is not pleased, great Arthur, with our quest, else ‘twould not lower as it hath done since here we came.”

“Heaven will not desert its faithful worshippers,” added the abbot of St. Mary’s, who now joined the lords of the shield and lance. “But the work of destruction is not complete; lo, yonder idol lifts up its broad black front uninjured!”

Here he pointed with his crosier towards a

huge rocking-stone supported, by two massy pillars of granite, which rose to the view at a short distance in the rear of the now prostrate shrine, and which seemed indeed to frown in sullen grandeur upon the less gigantic objects of its neighbourhood. The knights, however, not seeming very forward in declaring war against this proud relic of Druidic skill, he snatched the lance from the hand of Sir Tristan, and directing it himself against the supposed idol, destroyed its nice equilibrio, and the immense mass fell to the earth and was broken into ten thousand pieces, causing the whole island to tremble at the noise it made, and forcing open those impenetrable barriers which even Merlin's self had sealed! A faint ray of light was now seen to emanate from what appeared to be a rent in the side of the dark rocks opposite which our heroes stood; but which upon nearer approach they discovered to proceed from the opening of a pair of stupendous gates, which seemed to have been hewn out of the solid gra-

nite. The gallant adventurers fearlessly ascended the few mis-shapen steps which led to the entrance, followed by the cross-bearing Lleudad, who loudly and vehemently exclaimed, as he pressed on their rear, "it is the cavern of the Enchanted Shield!"

"Be the prize mine, then!" shouted out the son of Sir Lancelot, as he hurled his tough spear against the rocky barrier.—"The gates of *Hell* may not withstand the lance of Sir Galath!"

The sound of his assault re-echoed far and wide, and its hollow reverberations were heard booming under ground as through a long succession of subterranean vaults. The mighty gates trembled upon their hinges, and in a few moments fell with a deafening crash unto the earth; while at the same instant a broad and vivid flash of fire, more dreadful and terrific than the lightnings of autumnal storms, rushing from the now disclosed cavern, stretched the dauntless adventurers senseless upon the rock; not excepting the prime mover of the enterprize, who, indeed,

appeared to feel the shock even more severely than his less holy companions.

Sir Tristan and Sir Galath were the first to recover from the swoon into which they had been thrown, and gazed around with wonder and astonishment upon finding themselves standing in the entrance of a lofty vaulted passage, out of which several others, at various distances, were seen to lead—and all apparently blazing with an innate and unborrowed splendour. Stones, brighter, if possible, than the diamonds of eastern romance, poured forth a flood of light, whose pure rays, here glancing over rocks of sapphire, there falling upon clusters of emeralds or masses of flaming rubies, gave the whole interior the appearance of being illuminated by a countless succession of the most beautiful rainbows; the strong reflections of which were, however, powerful enough to dazzle, and indeed almost to destroy the sight of our sacrilegious heroes.

While the spell-contemning knights strove to accustom their aching eyes to behold that won-

drous blaze, the sounds of heavenly music broke upon their ears, and they heard the sweet voice of an invisible chorister warbling a soft and melancholy strain, which died away ere they could catch its burden, though not before the singer had been recognised.

“ That voice should be the voice of Anna ! ” said Sir Galath, as he rushed boldly forward, and became in an instant lost to the view of his fellow-adventurers. His sworn brother in arms, the cunning and skilful Sir Tristan, heedless of the threatened maledictions of the church, muttered a powerful, though forbidden charm, and followed in his footsteps. And thus King Arthur and the invincible Lancelot, were for once compelled to see themselves deprived of the high honour of leading on a doubtful and dangerous enterprize ; the spell-despising powers of their juniors in renown being, in their present quest, of more essential service than the lion heart and the well practised arm of battle-field or tourney. They, however, stayed not long behind, but,

leaving the good abbot of St. Mary's (who not being, like themselves, armed in proof, was fearful of plunging into unknown dangers) at the entrance of the cavern, to pray for their safety and mutter his Ave Marias ;—like true knights, and genuine champions of romance, fearlessly committed themselves to the perils of an untried element.

Repeating for ever and anon the dear name of his plighted Anna ; the brave Sir Galath continued valiantly on his subterranean way, meeting at every step of his advance, with some unearthly foe, in the shape of fiery dragons, and other frightful monsters ; but closing his eyes on their terrific aspects, and his ears on their hideous outcries, he passed through the midst of them untimidated, and finally arrived at a vast cavern, whose dome-like roof, which rose above his head to an immense height, he could not even look upon, so intense and overpowering was the blaze of silvery light which came therefrom, while from the part of the cavern opposite to that by which he had entered, a flood of softer light beamed

forth, whose violet-tinted rays formed themselves into a rich and splendid halo, in the centre of which, upon a tripod-shaped column of brightly-polished amethyst, was seated the long-lost daughter of the British prince, motionless as that column itself, but more beautiful far than all the ideal creations of minstrel or romance. Eager to obtain possession of the beauteous maid, Sir Galath sprung forward, but was arrested in his course by a loud and fiendish yell, which rung through the vaulted cave; and, stunned by the noise thereof, he fell as one bereft of life: and at the same moment a bright blue flame springing up from the rocky floor, formed a fiery and impenetrable barrier round the fair lady of the tripod.

Arthur, Sir Lancelot, and Sir Tristan, now entered together, and calling by name upon the fallen knight, aroused him from his stupor. As he recovered again his scattered senses, he would fain have rushed through the wall of fire to reach his plighted bride; this, however, he was pre-

vented from doing by the superior strength of his more prudent sire, who wisely forbore to contend with the powers of darkness, until he had first tried the effect of the mystic incantations which the sage Tristan was then engaged in calling to their aid. The charm worked well, and the bright flame already described, passing through all the various colours of the prismatic spectrum, finally sunk into the earth. Whereupon the spell-bound Anna, uttering a piercing shriek, sprang forward, and was received in the mailed arms of her brave and loyal knight; at the self-same moment, the beauteous column of amethyst, upon which she had sat, fell down and was shattered into ten thousand thousand fragments; and the whole fabric trembled and shook, as it would have fallen and crushed beneath its ruins those bold and reckless adventurers, who had dared to tread where mortal man had never trod before!

Sir Galath, overjoyed with the prize he had had already gained, left to his companions to pursue the adventure of the Enchanted Shield,

while he himself hastened away with his dear, though senseless charge, to regain the light of heaven. The chivalric and romantic soul of Arthur, father though he was, was bent upon another errand ; and therefore leaving his beloved daughter to the care of her future lord, he proceeded, accompanied by the dauntless Lancelot and Tristan, to explore the secrets of that wondrous cave ; and to essay the discovery of the miraculous treasure promised by the abbot of St. Mary's monastery, to him who should prove himself most worthy thereof.

Scarcely had Sir Galath left the cave, when the heroes of the Round Table were startled by a shrill bugle note, like to that of a gallant knight when he challengeth the lance of a brother in arms, in the courteous lists of the joust or the tourney ; and immediately an aged man, clad in the garb of an holy anchorite, stood before them, and demanded what brought them to the caverns of the Island of the Current ?—

“ We came hither, holy hermit,” answered the

inheritor of the dragon-crest, "to gain the renowned Pridwen, of whose wondrous fame the whole world hath heard.—If haply thou knowest, tell us therefore where it lies concealed, and doubt not but thy reward shall be such as it becometh princes to bestow."

"Pendragon's son," rejoined the hermit-like stranger, "keep thy rewards for others, and hie thee whence thou camest, least thyself and thy noble companions fall in seeking to gain that fatal treasure—for deem not, oh prince! that the prize thou hast spoken off, may be won without dangers and perils."

"Though all the legions of Hell oppose him, yet will not Arthur turn back, till he bears on his arm the shield of the radiant aspect!"

"Then, indeed, is thy choice made;—but woe to the beautiful isle!" So saying, the stoled speaker drew from beneath his robe a bugle, bright with precious gems, and applying it to his lips, made the whole place resound with its martial echoes. Two knights now started

into view, encased from head to foot in brightly-burnished suits of scale-armour, the refulgence of which beamed with no earthly lustre ; each had a buckler of matchless workmanship upon his left arm, and each right hand grasped a flaming falchion. The anchorite's weeds fell from the mysterious challenger, and he too, like his fellows, stood forth armed in proof, though shieldless, and with them assumed an attitude as of determination to oppose the farther advance of the champions of the church. The swords of the latter too were drawn, and with a loud shout, as was then the wont of knightly and unknightly combatants, they set upon their strange and wizard adversaries. The fight was long and desperate: the magic armour of the defenders of the cavern proving invulnerable to the weapons of the Round-Table knights. In vain did the noble and gallant Sir Lancelot essay to pierce the breast-plate of his foe ; in vain did Sir Tristan accompany his every blow, offensive and defensive, with words of talismanic power, the

enchantments of his antagonist were more potent than his own, and he fell;—but at this very moment, the renowned sword of Arthur, the ever-conquering Escalabar, was plunged into the heart's blood of the hermit knight, who, uttering a loud demoniac shriek, disappeared in the twinkling of an eye; whereat his companions relinquishing their half-vanquished foes, fled and were seen no more! In an instant the whole cavern shook, and an immense mass of the rock at its apparent extremity fell down with a tremendous noise, and disclosed to the astonished view of the victorious though terrified knights, the prize for which they had braved so many dangers—even the Enchanted Shield! and more than realizing by its surprising beauties, all their ideal conceptions.

In the centre of this wondrous shield, and formed of the richest and rarest mother-of-pearl, was the figure of a beautiful female, seated upon a tripod of amethyst, and around it a circlet of small golden studs; outside which, came another

of brilliant and sparkling diamonds—then a third of bright blue sapphires ; between which and the border of the shield, which was ornamented with alternate rows of diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, the highly-burnished steel might be seen, worked into the most gorgeous and costly devices, and representing in the quaintest allegories, the death of its owner, and the future destinies of the isle of Britain !

King Arthur having taken down the shield from its lofty repository, the whole cavern became forthwith dark as the dwellings of Hecate ; and, but for the light reflected by Pridwen, our heroes might have wandered amongst those dreary and subterranean abodes, until the time appointed for their being numbered with the mighty of departed years.

When the three knights obtained the end of their dangerous journey, and breathed again the breath of heaven, they found Sir Galath seated upon a fragment of the before-described cromlech, with the fair daughter of the Silurian prince

beside him, and the officious monk of St. Mary's monastery busily employed in erecting the standard of the cross upon the ruined altars of Druidism; while the whole chivalry of Caerleon were assembled around the entrance of the dreaded cave, anxiously waiting to hail the reappearance of their liege lord, and his danger-loving companions, Sirs Lancelot and Tristan.

Happy in the recovery of his long-lost daughter, and it may be, glorying yet more in his newly acquired treasure, the lord of the dragon-crest commanded his brave knights and true, to prepare for their immediate departure from the Island of the Current; and they accordingly returned the self-same night to St. Mary's holy abbey, where, in the presence of monks and mighty men, the ministers of peace, and the messengers of war, the immaculate and spotless knight, Sir Galath *le preux*, was rewarded for all his past toils and perilous undertakings, by the fair hand of the beauteous Anna.

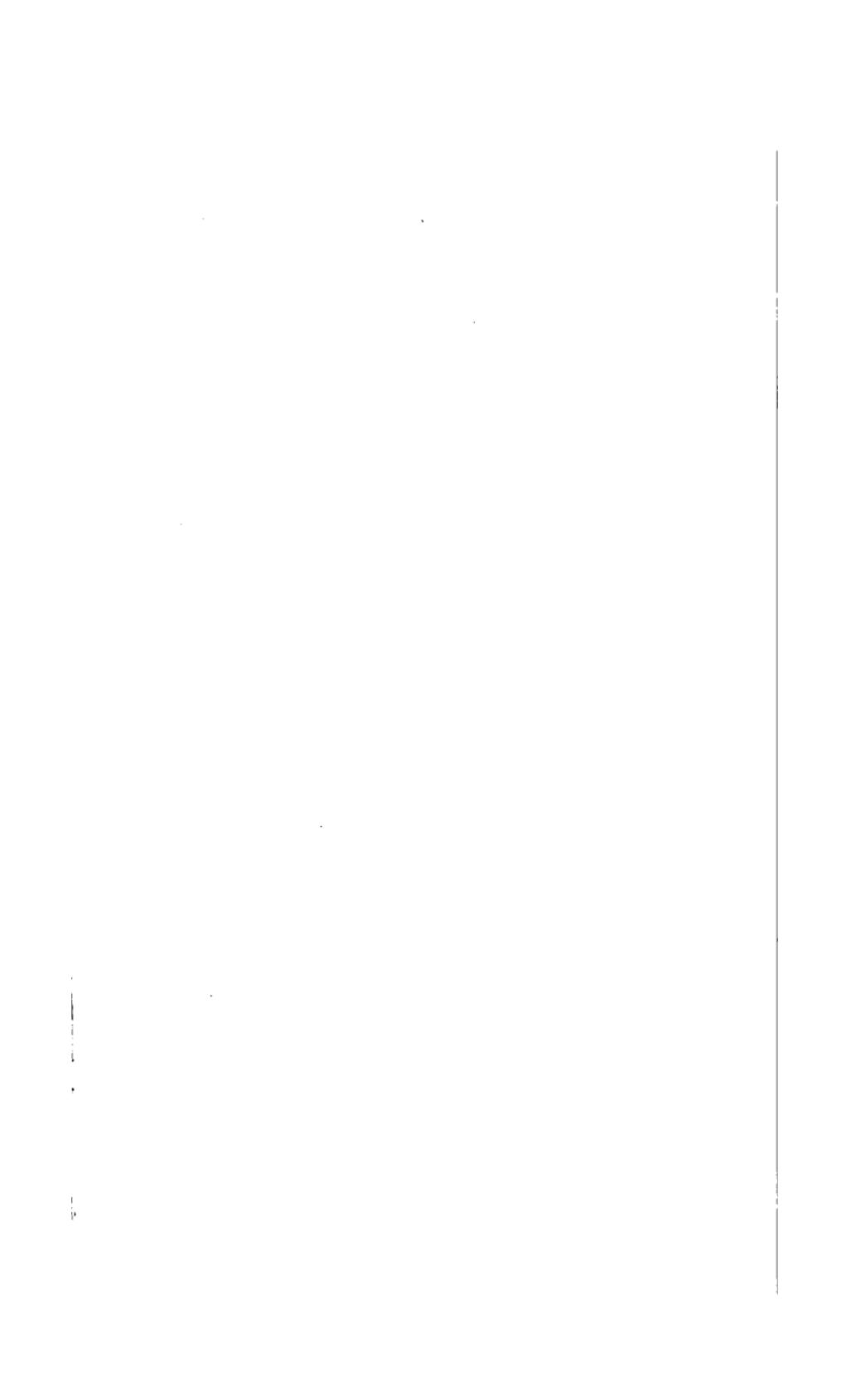
King Arthur, content with having obtained

possession of the radiant-fronted Pridwen, resigned, by formal deed, the island of Bardsey to the good monks of St. Mary's monastery for ever ; upon condition, that they should perform certain masses and repeat certain prayers, for the repose of the souls of himself and his Round-Table knights, when fate should call upon them to join the spirits of their departed sires !

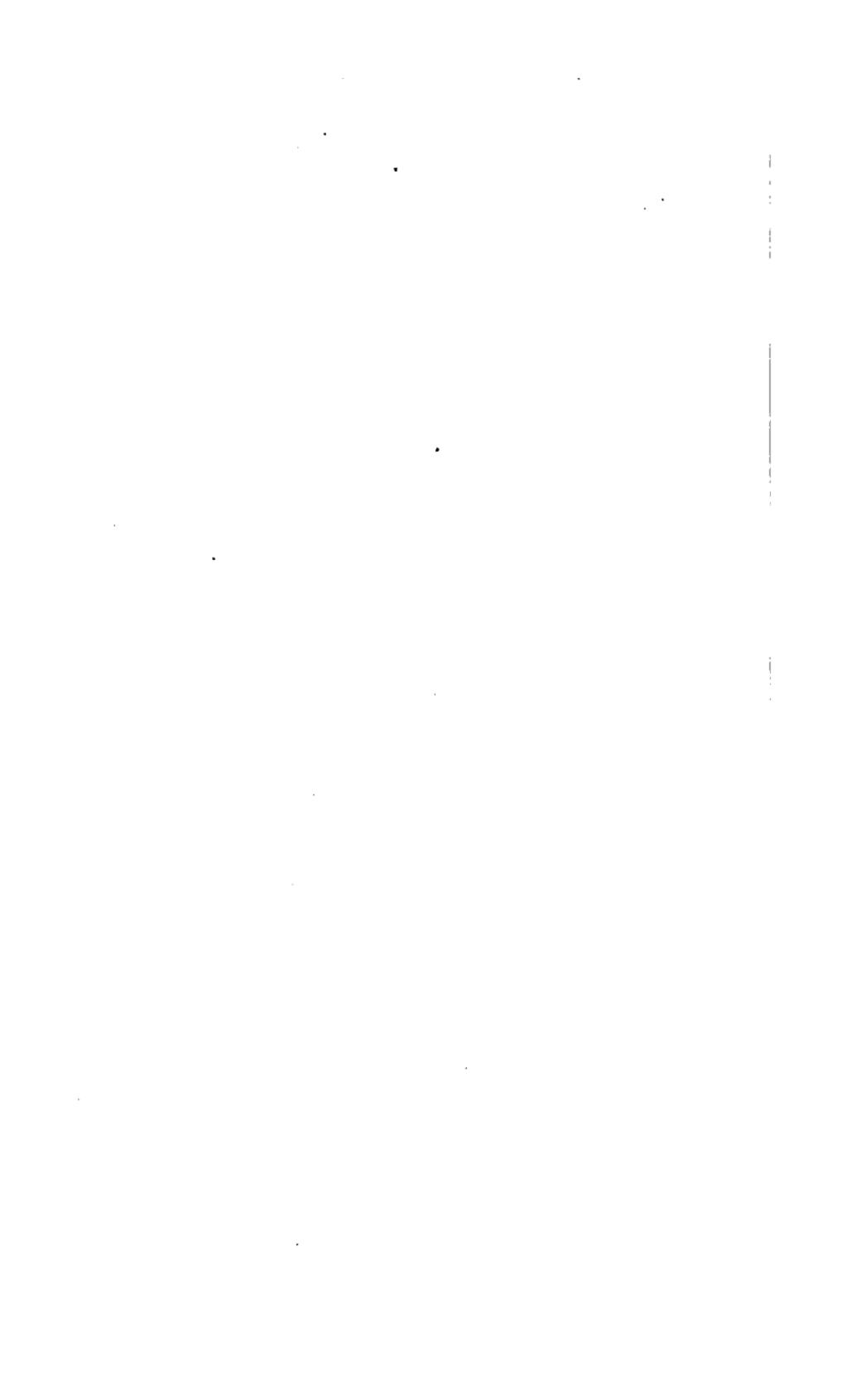
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Over the lofty towers of Caerleon, the blood-stained banner of war was again unfurled, and the princes of Britain were summoned, by the bended bow, to repair to that knightly rendezvous ; the great Arthur, anxious to put the boasted powers of Pridwen to the test, having declared war anew against his Saxon foes. But his career of glory was drawing to its close ; and that which should have proved his defence, became the very cause of his destruction. Envyng his uncle the possession of the matchless prize which he had so valiantly won, the ingrate, Modred, kindled the flames of civil discord, till they blazed far and wide o'er the

beautiful isle ; and, when bleeding on the fatal field of Camlan, the bravest knight of the Round Table discovered, alas too late ! that the brand of treachery could find its way to the heart, even through the ENCHANTED SHIELD !



THE DEVIL'S GORGE.



THE DEVIL'S GORGE.

A ROMANCE OF YORE.

Oh ! Sir Knight, I prithee go not
Where those gloomy waters roar;
Dangers thou dost little dream of,
Guard yon rough and rocky shore.

Many a dark and fearful story
Hath been told of yonder cave;
'Tis, in trth, a place of terrors,
'Tis a sure, but hopeless grave.

Anon.

ALTHOUGH I was never a great admirer of old Isaac Walton and his brethren of the angle, or took much delight in rambling "from morn till dewy eve" along the banks of the river, for the sole purpose of catching a supper, which might be procured at half the expense of the shoe-leather worn out ; yet I had not such a decided aversion to

the “sport,” (a misnomer with respect to myself), as to be deterred from treading the scenes of my childhood, in a character which I, then at least, not unfrequently assumed. The sports of our younger days are exhaustless sources of melancholy reflections to maturer years, especially when we attempt, by repeating them, to persuade ourselves that we are partaking anew of our earlier pleasures. In vain does man seek to cheat himself into a belief of that which he *wishes* to be true, namely, that time has gone over him, without effecting any alteration in the feelings of his heart. Experience teaches us that we cannot continue stationary: and ultimately we must acknowledge, however reluctantly, that every thing was formed for change; even the inanimate things which surround us. How often will the real landscape vary from the picture which had been delineated upon the tablet of the memory some twenty years before! A change in the lords of the soil occasions, not unfrequently, a strange metamorphosis in its appearance. Oh! I have, ere now, sought in vain

for some favourite retreat in the sunny seasons of youth : the merciless scythe of *improvement* had been there, and the spot had assumed a strangely altered aspect. Some luxuriant and majestic oak, hallowed by a thousand recollections, and round which my brightest thoughts would collect themselves as round a centre of gravity, had totally disappeared, and left a void in the mind and in the landscape. Who that has been nursed “far in the windings of a vale,” and spent his thoughtless days amid nature’s scenes of loveliness, hath not felt similar disappointment, and uttered his malison upon the unfeeling author of each alteration ? But for the changes which the spoiler’s hand hath wrought, he fancies that he might have, perchance, still tasted of the sweets of youth, forgetting that his own palate is vitiated, and willing to attribute his apathy to any other cause than the real one. But I must leave my feelings, and return.

My readers have already been told, that I entertain but a very so so opinion of the art of snaring

the “little naiads” of the stream : what wonder
then if I soon forgot

The well-dissembled fly,
The rod, fine tapering with elastic spring ;

and all the other paraphernalia which go to the formation of a “genuine brother of the angle.” I did as much injury to the finny tribes as the urchin fisher at the New-River Head, who watches his motionless float through the live-long day, with a patience that would bespeak him to be a lineal descendant of Job ! Than fishing, the clear streams of the Ogmore had far other charms for me ; and as, while I slowly crept along its banks, my fly sunk into the water instead of skipping lightly over its surface, or got entangled among the willows or the blackberry bushes, I soon grew weary of my “sport,” and feeling convinced that I was not in the fishing vein, I wound up my line, and took my rod to pieces.

Being freed from the angler’s trammels, I mended my pace, and in a few minutes was in the

midst of the most wild and romantic of my boyhood haunts. A collection of huge and misshapen rocks, over and between which the mountain-torrent of the Ogmore flowed, pointed out the scene of many a juvenile exhibition of courage and agility. Here it was that both were put to the test, as the stripling leaped from one huge mass to another with an air of boyish triumph. Certain traces which could not be mistaken, informed me that the dangerous exercise which erst delighted me, was still continued by those who had become my successors; who also, in their turn, were destined to be succeeded in a few short years by another, and, as yet, unborn generation.

Above me, and around, an immense cliff presented its naked front to the perpetual action of the wind and waters; on its summit a forest of ancient elms waved their branches in all the luxuriance of summer, and by intercepting the free passage of the sun's rays, cast a twilight gloom over the scene beneath. In different parts of the

cliff I beheld the dark retreats of the poachers of the stream ; frequently have I seen them issue at midnight, from the caverns which abound in its sides, and steal from crag to crag, with their lighted wisps, alluring the incautious salmon within the reach of their fatal trident. It is surprising to behold the skill and dexterity which some of these fishermen exhibit in their illegal pursuit ; the faint reflections of a wisp enabling them to spear their prey at a distance of several yards, when the intended victim is invisible to all other eyes ; and so sure is their aim, that they are rarely known to miss. With many of these haunts the village bards have made very free, and they form a prominent feature in the 'Legendary Lore' of the surrounding neighbourhood. As all the stories have a great similarity with each other, I shall content myself with relating one of them, which, however, may be taken "as a sample for all the rest." Some "cunnyng" critic will perhaps prove it to be borrowed from the German, or at least ascertain that it originates in the barbarous

mythology of Scandinavia;—what boots it? I give as I received it; for

Oft have I heard the fearful tale,
From Sue and Roger of the vale,
On some long winter's night.

As, however, it has been hitherto “a tale without a name,” I will, with my reader’s permission, christen it with that of the cavern in which the events it relates principally occur; namely, THE DEVIL’S GORGE. A place not improperly denominated, if any place “in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth,” can be said to deserve such a title of terror. Even now, while attempting its description, I feel a passing tremor steal over me, akin to that which I invariably experienced when gazing upon the frightful and appalling reality. The lower entrance, being that through which the stream rushed to this gloomy cave, was about six feet square (if we may use such a term for that which was perfectly shapeless); and presented, from the opposite side of the river, a somewhat sublime appearance, as the

waters, dashing from one huge mass of rock to another, were driven back again into the main current, or hurried impetuously forward into the ever-open "jaws of death." For the distance of many yards around this fatal opening, the ruggedness of its bed kept the river in a state of continual and fearful agitation, which, when swelled by the mountain rains, gave it the appearance of the ocean itself, when, tossed by conflicting winds, the eye beholds only one immense sheet of foam, and the ear is sensible of no other sound than that of the boisterous breakers. At the height of twenty or thirty feet above the river, was another and more spacious entrance, attained without much danger, save to persons of weak nerves, by ascending a rude, though secure ledge of rocks. From this point the deep cavern became visible. At the first gaze, a place of utter darkness was alone perceived, though after the eye had accustomed itself to the sight, the "*blackness of darkness*" disappeared, and a scene of perfect sublimity (if the theory of Burke be valid), became

dimly distinguishable. A rude and irregular flight of steps, or rather of huge stepping-stones, stood proffering their assistance to the inquisitive and fearless adventurer who wished to explore the secrets of the perilous abyss, while a feeble glimmering of light, issuing from below, seemed, like the rays of hope, to invite him onward. After a descent of ten or twelve yards, the spacious cavern opened upon the view. The supply of light received through the openings in the rocks above, and reflected again by clusters and masses of spar into every part of this subterraneous dwelling, gave it a most unearthly aspect, heightened, as this effect was, by the sullen roar of the stream which ran through its centre, and which had now exchanged its tumultuous, for a more silent, but scarce less destructive course. Unlike the foam of ocean, it now rushed along its well-worn bed, black as the fabled waters of Avernus. Its race was short, and it fell with a loud noise into the Devil's Gorge, a huge basin at the end of the cavern, where it was lost for ever.

I have deemed it necessary to be thus minute in my description of this place, for two reasons—First, to convey to my reader some some idea, however faint, of the principal scene in the tradition I am about to relate; and, secondly, because I have never seen it described in any of the “thousand and one” travels which undertake to give an account of every natural and artificial curiosity in this part of his Majesty’s dominions, from the minute pebble on the sea shore, to the gigantic mountains of Eryri !

Having premised thus much, let me reconduct thee, gentle reader, though but for a moment, to the open air and clear sky. In some remote period of “the good old times”—tradition, however careful of events, pays but little regard to dates and chronological appendages—the course of the Ogmore ran for some miles through the princely heritage of the Lord Villemorris, a name once well known, though at present rarely pronounced, except in connexion with some local legend, or story of the olden time. This hero of the regions of

romance, unlike many of his compeers in time and circumstance, was possessed of principles which did honour to their possessor. He was generous in the extreme; and his valour is even still the theme of song;—and yet he was pacific! a trait of character which, in the feudal ages, was seldom found united with courage, where the latter had the means of displaying itself. Those over whom he was placed in authority, found in him a gentle master. His vassals were ever welcome to his board; and in the wide circuit of his possessions, one place alone was forbidden them—it was the **DEVIL'S GORGE**. With all his princely virtues, Villemorris was highly superstitious, and gave full credence to the idle tales which were current, many of them relating to the above spot. It was then stated to be the abode of demons, or of those with whom they held communion; and the hoarse sounds which, in the present day, are attributed to their proper cause, were then ascribed to an infernal power. The generous chieftain yielded the more ready belief to these stories of “gorgons

and monsters and chimeras dire," from the circumstance of one of his own ancestors having perished in the fatal cave ; his frail bark having been sucked into the current, and its master precipitated into eternity.

Villemorris came into possession of his hereditary domains while yet a mere stripling ; and, ere the years of his minority had well expired, he received as his bride, the "lovely lady of the peerless brow," —such was the romantic epithet bestowed on the daughter of a neighbouring chief, whose name has not been so fortunate as to escape the all-grasping talons of oblivion. Tradition knows her only as the Lady Villemorris, her maiden name having shared the same fate as that of her sire.

Not many months after their union, the Castle of Villemorris was visited by a gallant stranger, who, in evil hour for its peaceful possessors, sought shelter behind its walls. Sir Hugh Mathraval was a knight of fame, not fortune. He had been frequently engaged, as knights were wont, in the princely tournament, and had shared the honours

of many a well-fought field. His bearing was such as became one who "had been brought up in the English court," and he might have almost stood for the representative of chivalry, adorned as that character is with all the ideal creations of romance. But with these "outward and visible signs" of true nobility, his soul was tinctured with the vice of avarice; and this unprincely passion took at times such strong hold upon him, as to make every other subservient thereto, while it reigned sole monarch of his breast, and controlled the events of his life. This passion it was that gave birth to a design of the most consummate atrocity. He had not spent many days at the mansion of the young and hospitable Villemorris, when he entertained the thought of becoming lord of his fair domains. Yet how to accomplish so wild a design? Gold might assist him! but Sir Hugh, we have already said, was a knight of fame, not fortune. Possession of this last was not, however, *quite* hopeless; and he listened with avidity to the following vague prophecy, the truth of

which he determined to take the earliest opportunity of ascertaining :—

Seek not riches in the mine—
Seek not wealth o'er ocean's brine—
Wouldst thou heir a prince's dower?—
At the solemn midnight hour
Seek the Devil's Gorge ! for there
Wealth awaits thee—yet beware !
Shun it if thou heed'st the scoff
Of mortal man !—Enough ! Enough !

The promise of wealth had a greater influence upon the mind of Sir Hugh, than the warning with which the prophecy concluded, and he therefore resolved, come what might, to explore at midnight the secrets of a spot, forbidden, even in the light of day, by one whose *veto* had hitherto been scrupulously attended to. One servant constituted the whole of his train, and to him alone did Mathraval confide the secret of his intention. As he could not leave the castle at such an unseasonable hour without giving rise to some strange suspicion, he determined to bid adieu to his generous host, promising however

to return again ere long. If his arrival had been sudden and unexpected, his departure was not less so.

When Sir Hugh Mathraval left the castle of Villemorris the day was far advanced, and its monarch was rapidly descending towards the west, while night was preparing her mantle of clouds in which to envelope the empire he was about for a few short hours to resign. The knight had not proceeded very many miles in a direct path, when, fetching a circuit, he arrived long before midnight, within a short distance of the place from whence he had started. Under cover of a thick wood, which skirted the river, a small coracle had already been concealed, well fitted, from its extreme lightness, to pass upon its way unheard. In this Sir Hugh and his attendant placed themselves, and gliding gently down the stream, soon arrived at a convenient landing-place. Here, quitting the frail vehicle, they wound their way along a perilous and rocky path, and guided by the dim light of the mist-

clad moon, as she appeared at intervals between the passing clouds, reached the entrance of the Devil's Gorge.

Here the adventurous knight commanded his companion to wait till his return, and lighting his torch, proceeded a few steps in the descent. He paused awhile! Could it be fear?—No: behold he is upon his way again! Many times, however, did he make similar pauses, ere he reached the bottom of the dangerous declivity; when, overcome partly by fear, partly with awe, at the blackness around him, he clung instinctively to a projecting crag—his torch fell from his hold into the stream beneath, and hissing for a moment, was for ever extinguished. A loud noise, half yell, half shout, now echoed through the cavern, and was in a short time succeeded by scarcely less discordant sounds, proceeding from the throats of some invisible beings, who immediately commenced the following

CHANT.

I.

FELL spirits, that glory
In darkness and gloom,
That haunt the drear dwellings
Of death, and the tomb ;—
That ride on the tempest,
And walk on the wind,
Still ruling, controlling
The fate of mankind :
Forth from the blackness
That reigns in the Gorge,
'Tis the hour of midnight—
Up, fiends, to your charge !

II.

Behold where a mortal
Stands trembling with fear
On the verge of the portal,—
Say, what doth he here ?
Who sways his existence ?
Who witness'd his birth ?
Come, spirits, and challenge
A demon of earth !
Keep him not waiting
Thus long at your gate,
Shew him his destiny—
Read him his fate !

SPIRIT.

III.

I rule o'er his being,
I witness'd his birth,

And mine 'tis to challenge
This demon of earth !
Mortal, thy mission
Thou need'st not unfold,
Thou seekest for jewels
And ingots of gold :—
Nor this the sole object
That troubles thy rest,—
I know every thought that
Is born in thy breast !

IV.

Go see where the treasures
Of Villemorris shine,
And look on his lady,
For both shall be thine
Confide in thy falchion,
Before thy renown,
And all his possessions
Shall soon be thine own ;
And fear not the vengeance
Of earth's guilty crew,
No power that is human
Shall injure Sir Hugh !

The demon strain was done ! The midnight
wind was again heard whistling through a thou-
sand clefts in the rocks above and around, and
mingled with the hoarsely murmuring roar of the
falling waters, formed a chorus in perfect keeping
with the thrilling song.

When his light was extinguished, Sir Hugh Mathraval, as has been already related, had clung to the rock for support, and there he still remained, like one rooted to the spot, or as if he had been transformed into a portion of the flinty substance. He had not once attempted to alter his position, nor indeed had he power so to do. He had heard a chorus of unearthly voices chant an unearthly song, which his ear had received, and which, without his having been conscious of listening to it, had become indelibly engraved upon his memory. Fear had taken complete hold upon him; and what wonder that it should have done so in such a situation, if it be true that “the same warrior who has braved a thousand deaths in the field, is palsied with horror in crossing a burial-place by night?”

Several weeks elapsed, and the Lord Villemorris neither saw nor received any tidings of his late visitor; but when late one night—it was a night of gay festivity, and well indeed it might be, since it was commemorative of the

birth-day of his “ fair ladye,”—he appeared suddenly amongst the guests. At such a season as this chanced to be, all were alike welcome to become partakers of the hospitality of Ville-morris castle, and especially all who were so fortunate as to be ranked by its lord among the number of his friends. It is useless to describe the banquet, since it differed in nothing from what has been so often described before.

There were bright faces in the busy hall,
Bowls on the board, and banners on the wall.

When Sir Hugh first introduced himself to his noble entertainers, it was as a soldier of fame ; now he came before them as a soldier of fortune, and the knight *sans argent*, lacked neither gold nor jewels, and beside, was the master of a numerous retinue. None could tell how he had become possessed of so much wealth. “ ‘Twas passing strange !” and many stories were told on the subject, by no means favourable to his reputation. Some even went so far as to hint

at the possibility of his having visited the Devil's Gorge; and to this circumstance is to be ascribed the origin of a local proverb applied to persons who have become suddenly rich without the village gossips being able to assign a satisfactory cause for it, namely, that such a one "has got his wealth in the Devil's Gorge."

The natural generosity of the Lord Villemorris prevented his harbouring the least thought injurious to the reputation of his guest, who was again ranked amongst the number of his friends. An occasional donative among the domestics silenced all rumours in that quarter, and by many he was accounted as second only to their lord. This was, however, only among the inhabitants of the castle, and the immediate partakers of his bounty. Without the castle's walls strange tales were told, and when Sir Hugh Mathraval appeared in the surrounding neighbourhood, he became a mark for the silent finger of scorn. At times it was with difficulty that he restrained his feelings, when the free tiller of

the ground, whose interest was not likely to be injured by such conduct, shunned his presence as he would one infected with the plague, or where this could not be done,—solemnly crossed himself as the knight rode by. At length the Lord Villemorris began to observe these things, and partly from sympathy, partly from his superstition having overpowered his generosity, gave credit to many of the current rumours respecting his friend. He fancied Mathraval lacked his wonted cheerful openness, and he soon began to feel a fidgetty uneasiness when he happened to be in his company. He became cool in his manner, and strove to avoid him as much as possible. He wished him gone, but his good-nature would not allow him to command the departure of one who had been re-welcomed to his hearth with feelings of ardent friendship.

Nothing so effectually dries up every spring of virtuous feeling in the human heart, and changes man into a demon, as the supposition that he is an object of scorn and disgust to others—that

he is shunned and avoided by those persons who once sought his company. He very soon realizes their gloomy imaginings, and becomes really and truly an object of terror. Sir Hugh Mathraval proved the truth of this assertion. He was not insensible to the altered conduct of his host, but gradually imbibed a bitter hatred towards him. His honour was assailed ! He thought of the Devil's Gorge, and the promise there made him, by no human power; and urged on by the spirit who "swayed his existence," he resolved to avenge himself upon his benefactor, and thereby fulfil the dark decrees of fate.

* * * *

Well pleased did the Lord Villemorris hear his guest announce his intention to bid adieu to the castle ; and saw his gloomy and taciturn attendant prepare for the departure. The last evening arrived ;—he could not refuse the invitation of Sir Hugh to make a final visit to the romantic spots around. The evening was fair and beautifully

bland ; but as the sun sank beneath the western horizon, and the moon rose in the east to supply his place in the firmament, the clouds were seen to ascend in dark and detached masses, betokening the approach of a storm, which was confirmed by the large pale halo which encircled the and fair virgin queen of night. Villemorris felt ill at ease in his company, and urged their return, lest the approaching storm should overtake them. The wind had already risen, and rendered all their caution necessary to preserve them from falling as they traversed the rocky shelves above the black waters of the Ogmore. On the part of Villemorris this caution was vain. The sight of the furious element below, brought to the mind of his companion the vague prediction of the unseen spirit, and he fancied he heard it even still ringing in his ears—

Confide in thy falchion,
Before thy renown,
And all his possessions
Shall soon be thine own.

And in a paroxysm of madness, he obeyed the dire command, and plunged his sword into the back of his generous host ! Villemorris shrieked, and fell, pushed over the precipice by the demon-nerved arm of his assassin. The noise of the fall was drowned in that of the boiling waters ; and Mathraval stood gazing into the dark void beneath him, and smiled upon the deed he had done !

* * * *

Though none could tell by what unaccountable concatenation of events Sir Hugh Mathraval became lord of Villemorris Castle, yet so it was. In this circumstance, at least, the interference of a power foreign to that of earth appeared evidently visible. No one attempted to oppose his usurpation ; though conscience proclaimed aloud, that it was by his hand their late beloved master had met his untimely death. As for the Lady Villemorris, she was too much overwhelmed with grief, to attempt to thwart the guilty measures of the ambitious knight, until it was too late ; and she determined at once to

retire into a convent, there to pass the remainder of her days far from the object most hateful to her sight. Such a measure would, however, have disconcerted the plans of Sir Hugh, who, though the tacitly acknowledged lord, felt that his title wanted that security which her hand, alone could confer. His importunities were treated with contempt; and alternate threats and promises were resorted to in vain, the resolution of the Lady Villemorris were not to be shaken: she was resolved never to marry the man to whom rumour ascribed the murder of her lord.

To the indignant Sir Hugh, one resource yet remained, a visit to the Devil's Gorge! The hour of midnight came, and accompanied by his faithful Walter; he sought its baneful precincts. As at his first visit, he spoke not; the self-same horror which overpowered his senses then, again seized him! He heard the same invisible voice chanting the same unearthly strain. It ceased: the same invisible being, whose decree he seemed born to fulfil, again addressed him—

Go see where the treasures
Of Villemorris shine,
And look on his lady,
For both shall be thine !

And was this all ? Not so : the lips of Sir Hugh Mathraval were unsealed ; and he bound himself, by no ordinary vow, to visit the Devil's Gorge again, as soon as the prediction of its unholy tenants was fulfilled !

* * * *

In the castle of Villemorris there was no ordinary stir ! The voice of the trumpet had ushered in the morn, and the silver-fringed banner of its ancient lords, was again waving over its lofty towers. Its numerous domestics have exchanged the sable dress of grief for the gayer colours of rejoicing ; and behold in its spacious courtyards, bards and minstrels have assembled, and are tuning their harps, as if in expectation of some high and joyous festival. What can it be ?—The illuminated chapel, and the stoled priest, standing in an attitude of deep devotion, with all the paraphernalia of the nuptial ceremony arranged around

him, indicate the answer. The lovely lady of the peerless brow, is to be united to him whose importunities she had so often rejected with scorn and indignation.—Let us not dwell upon the unnatural, the unaccountable event. The trembling priest hath ended his reluctant task, and the Lady Villemorris has become the wife of him who made her first a widow !

Amidst the height of the bustle which followed their union, Sir Hugh Mathraval forgot not his vow. He stole from his guests, and hastened towards the water's edge, where to avoid discovery, entering into a small boat, he pushed off towards the mouth of the appointed rendezvous. The river had recently been swollen by a mountain flood, and the knight soon found that he had committed a fatal error in now seeking the Devil's Gorge by water. His frail bark was borne along with a force and rapidity which rendered perfectly useless every attempt to check its speed. He shot through the “jaws of death,” and as he entered upon the more silent, but not less rapid

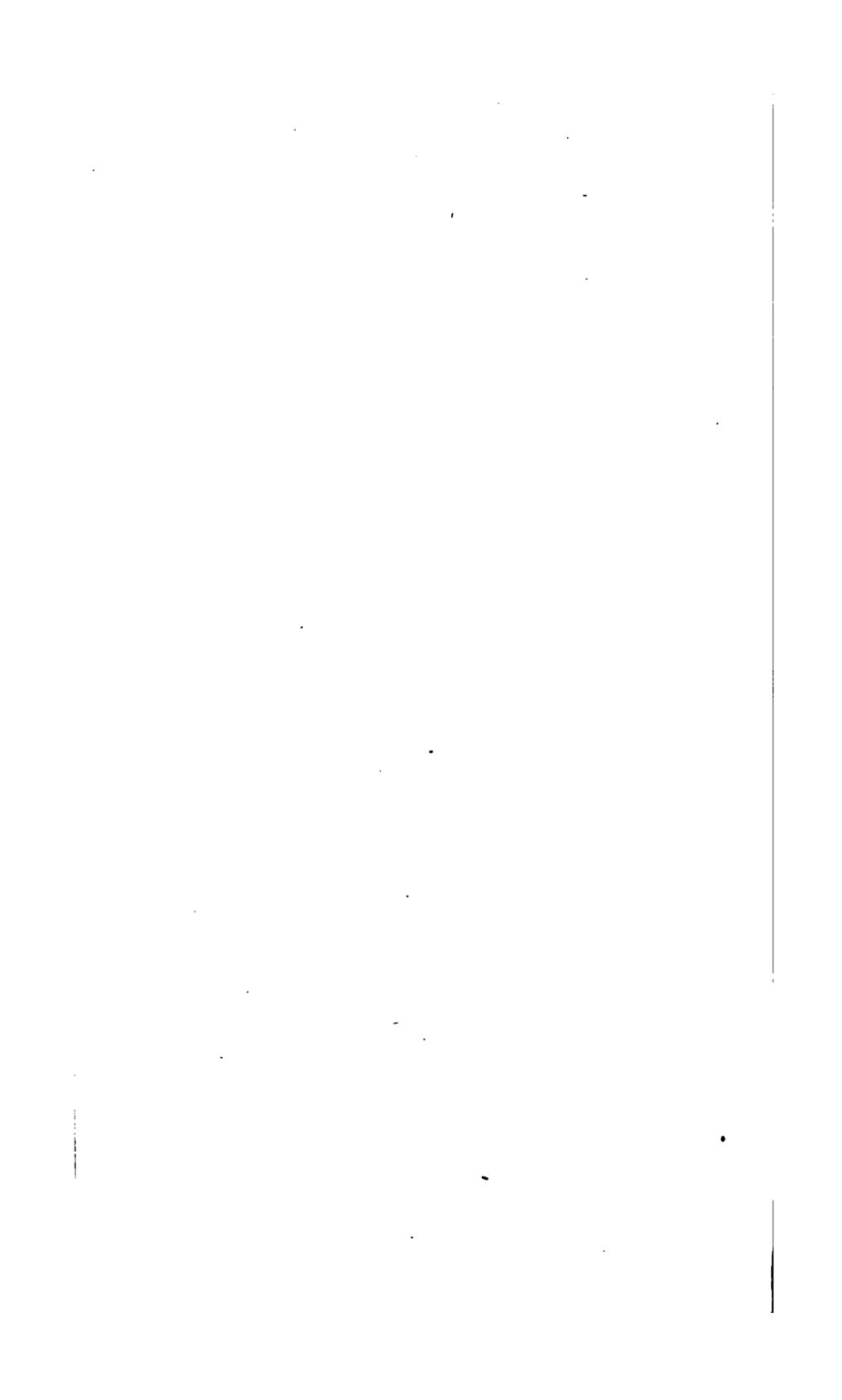
stream in the dark interior of the cavern, and was hurried onward to inevitable destruction, he recognised the familiar, but now unwelcome strain—

Go see where the treasures
Of Villemorris shine,
And look on his lady,
For both shall be thine ;
Confide in thy falchion
Before thy renown,
And all his possessions
Shall soon be thine own.
And fear not the vengeance
Of EARTH's guilty crew,
No power that is HUMAN
Shall injure Sir Hugh !

Reader,—askest thou the fate of the lovely lady of the peerless brow ? She complied with the advice of Denmark's prince, and retired, "to a nunnery !" The princely domains of Villemorris were divided among his vassals and "poor relations," while his name was transferred—to the regions of romance !



THE TRAITOR'S GRAVE.



THE TRAITOR'S GRAVE.

A TALE OF THE CIVIL WARS.

With fairest flowers,
Whilst summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele,
I'll sweeten thy sad grave ; thou shalt not lack
The flower, that's like thy face, pale primrose.

Shakspeare.

BENEATH the shelter of a hedge, in a meadow a short distance west of Cardiff Castle, may (or *might* at least a few years ago), be seen a small mound of earth, ornamented during the months of spring and summer, not only with the choicest flowers of the field, but also with many others which serve to decorate the gardens of the peasant ; the cowslip, the primrose, the violet, and the wall-flower, flourished in wild, but neglected luxuriance ; while the rosemary and southernwood, and

thyme, loaded the air with their powerful perfume, and served to embellish the spot during those months when the charms of their less hardy companions had shrunk beneath the chilling blasts of winter. No person claimed them as his own, or attended to them as they appeared ; and both the flower and shrub seemed to spring into existence, apparently for no other purpose than

“ To waste their sweetness in the desert air.”

True it is, they escaped not the keen eye of the school-boy in his daily rambles, but they remained unmolested, even by his thoughtless and all plundering hand. He would admire them as he passed, or mayhap, stoop down to inhale more effectually the odour which they emitted—it was all he dared do, for some invisible being seemed to whisper him “ thus far shalt thou go and no farther.” Obedient to the voice, he left them where they were, nor even ventured to gather, or to give them a place in his nosegay. Thus on the bed where they first blossomed, they withered and

decayed; no one being found so irreverent as to pluck them, for they were guarded by the spell which superstition frequently casts around the final resting-place of man. The spot was known by the name of "the Traitor's Grave," and the circumstances connected with it, are thus chronicled in the records of tradition.

During the civil wars, when the victorious Cromwell, after having brought nearly the whole of England into subjection, by the matchless prowess of his arms, was proceeding with his accustomed vigour to chastise the few bold spirits who kept still firmly attached to the cause of the king, in the principality, he met with an unexpected opposition from the Governor of Cardiff Castle, who, notwithstanding the terror of Cromwell's name, sent out a bold defiance in answer to the herald's challenge, summoning him in the name of the parliament to surrender,—“I hold my castle from the King,” exclaimed the haughty Beauford, “and to him only will I give it up.” The stern puritan, enraged at this answer, and still more so

at the unlooked-for obstacle, thus suddenly starting up to check, as it were, the rapidity of his conquests, commanded his officers instantly to commence the siege of the place. The command was hardly given ere it was obeyed ; and trenches were dug, and batteries erected, with that rapidity which always marked the movements of the rebel army, when headed by the commander, who this day led them on. The works were not begun till some time after sun-rise, yet before noon the siege had regularly commenced, and the lofty battlements of Cardiff Castle rung with the sounds of the invader's cannon, as they

“ Roar'd aloud,
And from their throats with flash and cloud,
Their showers of iron threw.”

The massy walls, however, resisted stoutly ; and suffered no very material injury from the repeated discharges of the enemy's artillery, which failed in every attempt to make a breach : thus passed the first day.

On the morning of the second, the parliamentary

general again sent his demand for them to surrender, but the herald returned with an answer of similar import with the first. Cromwell was not a man who could be induced to waste his time in fruitless parleys; and when he found that threats were unavailable, he instantly had recourse to more powerful arguments. These therefore he ordered once more to be brought into action against the enemy, in hopes that his cannon would accomplish that, which his flag of truce had failed to do,—bring the garrison to reason. The second day however closed, without bringing with it any greater hopes of success, than that which had preceded; at least so it appeared to the besiegers, who, having of late been accustomed to sudden and easy surrenders, began to despair of being able to reduce a fortress, which had thus for two days gallantly withstood an hitherto irresistible artillery. Even Cromwell himself grew fearful of the event, and could ill brook that a single castle should thus be able to retard his march, and occasion him such loss of time, of

men, and ammunition. Nor was this all: he beheld with no small degree of chagrin, that the friends of Charles, taking advantage of his present stationary position, were preparing for a vigorous defence, and strengthening their respective castles for this purpose against his approach. The unsuccessful attempt of the second day, had indeed so far emboldened some of the more daring royalists, that they ventured, under cover of the night, to attack his very camp, succeeded in driving in the picquets, and caused such confusion among the troops, that it was not until Cromwell himself came forward, that the intruders were driven back, and order restored. This unfortunate incident made him sensible of the awkward situation in which he was placed, and convinced him of the absolute necessity of altering his plan of action as speedily as possible, as he saw that by occupying his present position, unless the garrison very shortly capitulated, the longer he remained there, the greater would be his disgrace, if from any untoward circumstance he should at last be

compelled to give up the undertaking. He therefore formed a determination in his own mind, of raising the siege on the succeeding night, in case he proved as unsuccessful on that, the third, day, as he had hitherto been. He resolved however by his conduct, not to give the enemy any ground to entertain such hope, and upon the appearance of daylight, the batteries were again mounted, and every gun put into requisition. Nothing could possibly have withstood the fire of this day, except the most determined bravery on the part of the besieged: this they happily possessed; and the military skill shewn by their engineers was such, that ere sun-set, they had effected the destruction of nearly the whole range of the enemy's defences. But, unfortunately, this was not done until their own walls were in so shattered a condition, that another such day must inevitably have sealed their doom, by compelling them to surrender whether they willed or willed not.

Under these circumstances, on the part of the garrison, Sir J. Beauford consented, after much

solicitation, to call a council of the officers of which it was composed, in order that some measures for their mutual safety, in the present emergency, might be speedily adopted ; for the ramparts had given way in several places, and it would be vain to attempt a resistance, should the enemy endeavour to force an entrance, as breaches were visible in every part of the fortifications, and the approach of night was the only thing which appeared to prevent them taking immediate advantage of these circumstances.

At the time appointed, the council assembled : despair was plainly predicted upon the features of those who composed it ; but at the same time their bold, though bandaged appearance, told that they had resolution even in despair. Though each person was in his place, yet no one ventured to break the ominous silence which reigned in the apartments. At length, Beauford himself addressed those around him—"Fellow officers," said he, "This castle was confided to our keeping by the King, and it is my intention to be faithful to the trust. We have assembled

here to consult further means for its safety: to *this* point then confine your observations and advice, for mark me! the first among you who counsels, or even hints at submission, shall be shot, though that shot be the last in the garrison! We have met here to *defend*, and not to *betray* our trust! and, while two stones cleave together, let no one talk of yielding!"

Struck by these remarks, and by the manner in which they were spoken, every one remained silent; for each had, in his own mind, come there for no other purpose than to form some plan for the preservation of their lives, and if no other could be found, to agree to the terms for capitulation, should the castle be again attacked, as it was utterly impossible to defend it longer, and madness to attempt any resistance further than was necessary, in order to obtain from the victor as favourable terms as possible. The passionate Beauford, as the silence still continued, turned to those around him, and knitting his eye-brows, until his countenance put on a fiend-like look, giving vent to his rage, exclaimed aloud,—

“ Was I summoned here to be made a fool of, or, cowards as ye are, think ye, that like yours, my heart harbours thoughts which my tongue dares not express. Begone, I say, to your posts, and leave the care of providing for the castle's safety to me, since you appear to have forgotten the respect which you owe to your governor, as well as your duty to your King! Begone, I say, begone !”

Stung by such unmerited reproaches, a young, but intrepid-looking cavalier instantly started from his seat, “ A truce to your reproaches, Sir John. That they are unjust the wounds and scars we bear will testify, and vindicate our honour from the false charge of cowardice. We have neither forgotten our duty to the King, nor to our governor: but when the latter so far forgets himself, as to accuse those falsely who have cheerfully shed their best blood at his bidding, and neglects to provide for their safety in the hour of danger, it is time they look to themselves. Hear me then, I care not for the effects of your threatened vengeance. I have

hitherto fought as becomes a loyal subject of King Charles, but will fight no longer, unless the terms of a surrender be first agreed upon, in case the rebels venture to renew the attack to-morrow. Consent to this, and my sword is again at your service—else never. These are my thoughts, nor do I *fear* to utter them; now do your worst!"

Beauford, who had with great difficulty retained possession of his seat till the speaker had concluded, no sooner perceived he had done, than drawing his sword, he rushed forwards, and proceeded to put his threat into instant execution; and Walter Sele would have paid the forfeit of his life for his temerity, had not those around wrested the weapon of death from the hands of the governor; who, enraged at thus being thwarted, darted from the chamber, swearing he would have every soul of them shot for traitors.

At this time, when the enemy from without, and faction from within, threatened the castle with certain destruction, there were within its walls, besides the military who composed the

garrison, several ladies, whose friends or relatives, anxious for their safety, had placed them there as beyond the reach of danger. Among these was Deva Milton, the orphan daughter of an old cavalier. No more is known of the maid, than that she was fair, whether in the opinion of the world or not, it matters little, it is enough that she was so in the eyes of Walter Sele. To *him* she was “the *fairest* of the fair.” He loved her, and would, like every *true* lover, have periled his life to do her service. To her little chamber it was he repaired, when released from the duties of the day, and in her company was glad to forget for awhile the dangers which surrounded him. Here, therefore, he hastened upon his escape from the council-room; and here, too, he determined to remain patiently, until informed that the savage rage of the governor was cooled, and time, by replacing reason upon her throne, should have made him sensible of the error which he had committed. A time, alas! that Walter was not fated to behold.

It appears, however, that he was not the only person among the besieged, who was sensible of the charms of the fair Deva. The commandant himself, who, to his unshaken loyalty (almost his only virtue) added all that licentiousness and profligacy which characterised, in a greater or less degree, the reign of every monarch of the Stuart line : had also beheld and admired her charms ; but alas ! beheld, and admired them with the most dishonourable feelings ; and he seized what appeared to him a favourable moment, when the officers were engaged on more important matters, to gratify his lust ; glorying in the idea that he should, at the same time, by this means, inflict the most cruel of all punishments upon the unfortunate being who had offended him ; and blast for ever his brightest hopes, by ruining her, who was far dearer to him than his own life.

Having gained admission into her apartment, he proceeded to flatter and menace by turns, but all in vain. The virtue of Deva Milton was alike proof against both ; she upbraided him with his

baseness and villainy, and replied to his flatteries with taunts and reproaches. Enraged at her conduct, he seized her rudely, and was proceeding to gratify by force, both his revenge and his passion. His feeble victim shrieked aloud for assistance, but the echoes of her voice were the only answers she received. Spite of the resistance which she made, one minute more would have decided the struggle, and the fair Deva would have been—fair no longer. At this crisis, the room-door yielded to the strong nerves of Walter Sele, who, snatching a pistol from his belt, rushed upon the villain whom he saw before him, and presented it to his head; but even at this critical juncture he still retained presence of mind sufficient not to discharge it, lest, by any accident, the contents should injure her to whose rescue he had thus opportunely arrived. Beauford, on feeling so rude a grasp, let go the hold of his intended victim, and turned round to oppose this sudden and unlooked-for enemy. It was now no time for parley. In an instant the sword of each had left its scabbard.

“Coward and slave, by heaven you shall not again escape me !”

“Neither slave nor coward,” exclaimed the injured youth, as he recognised the well-known sound of the governor’s voice, “and that Beauford will soon discover too.” Flinging the pistol from his hand, he prepared instantly for the attack. The weapons met with the quickness of lightning, and though the event seemed to all appearance to depend most upon which was the strongest arm, yet the blows, however irregular and fierce, were frequently parried off with great skill, as each in turn became the assailant. The combat lasted but a few minutes, for the foot of Beauford striking against an iron ring in the floor, he stumbled, when putting out his sword to prevent his falling, it snapt, and of course occasioned that which it was intended to prevent. The issue of the strife seemed now determined: but it was not so; for on Sele’s springing forward to disarm his adversary, he received the contents of a pistol in his left shoulder, and fell prostrate beside him. A party of the

guard, who had been alarmed by the noise which the combat had necessarily occasioned, now rushed into the apartment, when Beauford, springing up, commanded them to raise his wounded antagonist, and to do as they were bid. He was instantly obeyed, and the soldiers having bound him as well as they were able, at the moment, followed the steps of their governor, who led the way to the foot of the staircase; where, opening a low and narrow door, he descended a few steps, when a similar barrier opposed them, which was also with some difficulty opened; and the interior of the castle-keep presented itself to their view, darker, if possible, than the sepulchres of the dead. Here, just within the entrance, Beauford commanded the men to lay down their burthen. They did so, and retreated. The door grating upon its rusty hinges, closed again; and the unfortunate Sele found himself left in a dark, damp dungeon, far from the reach of any human being.

Not having been severely wounded, the cold-

ness of the dungeon soon brought the ill-starred hero to a sense of his dire condition, when seating himself, (for the place he was in, would not allow of his standing), upon the step on which he had been left, he proceeded to bind up his wound with his handkerchief; after which he felt partially relieved. Perfectly aware, from the situation of his prison, that it would be in vain to attempt either by the loudness of his voice, or any other means now in his power, to make his friends acquainted with his fate, he made up his mind to bear manfully his confinement; encouraged by the hope, that the garrison would soon be obliged to surrender, when in all probability he should regain his liberty. But the thought of Deva being in the power of one, whom he was now forced to rank as his bitterest enemy, rushed across his recollection, and almost drove him to distraction. The pain of his wound, and the dampness of his habitation, however, soon made him sensible of his utter inability to be of any service to her by his lamentation; and reason

again assuming her dominion, he began to reflect upon the possibility of his being able to escape. At this instant, he fortunately bethought him of an old tale, which he had heard when a boy, respecting an outlawed chief, who, according to tradition, having been taken prisoner by the lord of Cardiff Castle, and confined in the cell he then inhabited, had effected his escape by means of a secret passage, which the bandit had accidentally discovered. Walter Sele, not being of a disposition to give way to despair, while the least glimmer of hope presented itself to his mind, seized eagerly upon this legendary account; and though not very sanguine in his expectations, determined at all events to attempt the discovery of the reported outlet, well knowing that the strong-holds of the feudal barons frequently abounded with a multitude of secret posterns, and subterranean passages, for which any person except the original proprietor, would be puzzled to find an use. Groping, therefore, his way, as well as he was able, he proceeded slowly along,

carefully examining with his hands the walls of the dungeon, which ere he had gone very far became sensibly larger ; and he was enabled to stand erect. Still holding on his dark and dreary track, he was, ere long, agreeably surprised to find himself come in contact with a strong current of air. He now became confident that he could not be very distant from some opening, and the castle clock, which he distinctly heard striking the hour of ten, confirmed him in this opinion. Directing his steps towards the point whence the draft appeared to issue, he soon found his course considerably impeded by heaps of rubbish, and large fragments of stone, which had evidently been forced out of their proper place ; and he rightly judged, from this circumstance, that here at least the enemy's artillery had accomplished their intended purpose. With a light heart, he cautiously removed the huge masses which obstructed his way, and in a short time had the happiness to find himself safe in the moat, on the north side of the castle.

Once more at liberty, he surveyed, as well as the darkness of the night would permit, those parts of the fortress which were near him. Burning with a desire of being revenged on the person who had so basely injured him, in an evil moment, he formed the fatal resolution of betraying the castle into the hands of the enemy; and this resolution was no sooner formed, than he proceeded to carry it into execution. The moat was cleared, and finding himself once more on *terra firma*.

"It shall be so," exclaimed he, "yes, this very night is Cardiff Castle, Cromwell's. A few feet of earth removed, admits him to the postern aisle—and once in, Beauford shall then oppose in vain,—Deva, I yet may snatch thee from the tiger's jaws, and I *will* do so, though I die traitor!" With these words, he turned his back upon those walls, which but a few hours before he had so gallantly defended, and sought with hasty strides the camp of Cromwell.

The distance being but short, he soon arrived

at the enemy's picquets, by whom, as he did not endeavour to conceal himself, he was of course seized. Having designedly thrown himself within their power, he now merely demanded that he might be led into the presence of the general ; with which demand, the guards, after first blind-folding him, in order that he might not distinguish the disorder that prevailed around, proceeded instantly to comply.

When ushered into the tent, and permitted again to make use of his eyes, he perceived Cromwell seated at a small table, gazing intently upon some papers which lay thereon. On the entrance of the prisoner, however, he raised his head, and attentively surveying his appearance ; in his usual harsh and abrupt manner, addressed the following laconic question to him :—“ How now, betinselled royalist ! your business here ? ”

“ I came to act, and not to parley,” replied the unintimidated Sele, “ to offer to a foe what most he wishes,—possession of our castle. If he accept the offer, let him get ready instantly, and trust to

the guidance of one who is willing to be his friend *to-night*; even at the expense of honour!"

Cromwell, who scarcely knew whether he ought not to look upon his prisoner as a madman, paused, ere he made any reply. However, as the chances, judging from the resistance which the garrison had already made, were so many against his being able to take the place by force of arms, he determined as a last resource, to embrace the opportunity which thus offered itself, be the consequences what they might.

"Be it so," was the answer; "he whom you address is always ready, lead on then, but hearken, haughty cavalier! should you belie your promise, your life shall be the forfeit."

"Had I been the subject of fear," replied Walter Sele, "I should not now be in the tent of Cromwell—a truce then to your threatenings! Yet think not I betray the royal cause thus basely. Hear first the terms: nay frown not; I'll not be frightened from my purpose by the frowns of any man! and unless my two conditions are agreed

to, not all your threats shall make me, *even now* turn traitor. My life is in your hands, and you may take it instantly, at midnight, or to-morrow ; but *that* is all you have within your power. Hear me then—I ask but for the life and freedom of the garrison, for every living soul, from the person of the governor, though he is now my foe, down to the meanest soldier that treads along the battlements. That the few females, one of whom is dearer to me than life, shall be secure from the gross insults of your rebel troops. On these conditions only, I become your guide!"

"Cromwell will pledge his word," was the reply, "that life and freedom shall be given to all at present within the castle walls ; and as for the women, the soldiers of the parliament, rebel or not, are not the licentious cavaliers of Charles, who need be under no anxiety for the safety of their courtesans. We came to fight with men, and not with women ! now are you satisfied."

Sele replied in the affirmative, observing, as he concluded, that he "would trust for once

to the *honour* of a round-head, if such a thing existed." Cromwell scowled, as it seemed as if his guide suspected his intentions; but prudence bade him conceal his rage, and he merely remarked, as he took his pistols from the table, that he might do so safely.

With a chosen body of men, upon whose fidelity he could depend, the usurper committed himself to the guidance of Walter Sele, whom, however, he kept close beside during the march, which, without occupying much of their time, brought them unseen to the opening from which the betrayer had escaped. The men having entered the breach, and being provided with the necessary implements, immediately commenced removing the earth from the spot pointed out to them, while Cromwell and his guide kept watch without. With such secrecy were their operations carried on, that no person within was in the least degree disturbed by them. Once only, and that by mere chance, had they any occasion to be alarmed. An officer marching to relieve guard, perceiving

from the rampart, some persons in the moat below, hailed them in the accustomed form:—“Who goes there?”—“Friends.”—“To whom?”—“To Beauford and the king.” Sele's presence of mind thus extricated them from this danger, for the officer, on hearing the pass-word, not doubting but they were sent there by the command of the governor, passed on his way, and left them to proceed with their undertaking without any further interruption.

The soldiers, after having effected an opening in the ground above, were enabled with very little trouble, by means of a temporary ladder, which they formed of the implements, to enter into the postern aisle, described to them by their guide. Here they had both time to rest, had also room enough to prepare themselves for the attack, which it was to be expected they would still have to undertake. At the end of the passage in which they then were, a narrow door was now the only barrier to be removed, ere they effected the object they had so long wished for—an

entrance into the heart of the fortress. From its situation, as they could not hope to penetrate this, however trifling it might appear, as silently as they had done the first, they proceeded by one sudden effort to force it open, and by the rapidity of their subsequent movements, to terrify the garrison from making any resistance. Nor where they disappointed, for the door yielding to the first assault, they found themselves in possession of the castle, before many of its inhabitants were even aware of their approach.

* . * . * . *

When morning dawned, the royal standard of the unfortunate Charles floated not, as heretofore, above the lofty battlements of Cardiff Castle; and those who had defended it so stoutly and so gallantly, had either fallen sword in hand, or had departed to seek for shelter in some other fortress, that was still enabled to keep on high a little longer the well known ensign of fast-falling royalty. One only of the former garrison remained; and he with beating heart and anxious look, had twice

already explored the intricacies of each apartment which the castle contained, in search of the object of his every hope and fear, but all in vain. Still coping with the grim fiend despair, he was in the act of doing so for the third time, when summoned, and upon refusing to obey, forced into the presence of the iron-hearted Cromwell. Forgetting for an instant his private griefs, he stood before the tyrant, with such a noble and majestic mien, as awed all those around; and even the mind of Cromwell *seemed* for an instant to be undecided. But that it was not so in reality, his address to the person who stood before him plainly indicated:—

“Now then, proud cavalier,” cried he, “has not the promise which I made been kept? Hath either maid or courtesan, for whom you dared to insult the troops of Cromwell, been violated? The life and freedom of the garrison was likewise promised, and it has been granted. Remember, when my word was pledged to this, *thou* was not one among them, therefore, I owe

thee nothing, since it was to gratify thy own revenge, and not from love to me, that thou hast betrayed thy party. Had the service which thou hast done us, been done with other motives, I would have thanked thee for it ; as it is, I love the treason, but I *hate* the traitor.—Take then a traitor's just reward !” Quick as thought, the pistol of the tyrant left its belt,—flashed—and Walter Sele lay weltering on the ground.

While the soldiers were in the act of interring, at the spot alluded to in the commencement of our narrative, all that now remained of the once brave, but ill-fated Sele, they were disturbed in their work, by the unlooked-for appearance of Deva Milton, who rushing eagerly forward, flung herself upon the lifeless corpse as it lay upon the green-sward, in the dress it wore while living. In vain did one, more feeling than his companions, endeavour to soothe her afflictions. Deaf to his consolation, and regardless of all his entreaties, she clung to the object of her affection with such vehemence, that the men had some difficulty to

tear it from her grasp, and even then, two of them were obliged to force her from the spot, while their fellows unfeelingly consigned the corse to its "mother earth." The hapless maiden, immediately the soldiers had closed up the earth and departed, returned again to search for her lover, exclaiming in a wild and incoherent manner, that she had "*found her Walter*,"—but alas! fair maid, she had lost her reason.

Poor Deva lived for many years,—lived to decorate the grave of him she loved, with the choicest shrubs and flowers which she could gather together. When the frosts of January threatened them with destruction, she would carefully cover them with straw, to be blown away perhaps by the next gust of wind; and when the clouds of Autumn withheld their accustomed tributary showers, *she* did not forget to water them. Summer and winter, day and night, sunshine and rain, were all alike to Deva; equally insensible to each, she sat upon a stone, which her own hand had placed at the head of the grave, and sung her favourite and never varying ditty of

GALLANT WALTER SELE.

I.

O'ER Walter's bed no foot shall tread,
Nor step unhallowed roam ;
For here the brave hath found a grave,
The wanderer a home.
This little mound encircles round
A heart that once could feel ;
For none possess'd a warmer breast,
Than gallant Walter Sele.

II.

The primrose pale, from Derwen vale,
Through spring shall sweetly bloom,—
And here I ween the evergreen
Shall shed its death-perfume ;
The branching tree of rosemary
The sweet thyme may conceal,
But both shall wave above the grave,
Of gallant Walter Sele.

III.

They brand with shame my true-love's name,
And call him traitor vile,
Who dar'd disclose to Charlie's foes,
The secret postern aisle.
But though, alas ! that fatal pass
He rashly dared reveal,
He ne'er betray'd his maniac maid,—
My gallant Walter Sele !

Reader, if thou believest not the above account, search, I beseech thee, the pages of history, and be convinced for once of the Truth of Tradition !

THE END



